

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Exploring the Schooling Experience of Disengaged Girls Aged 15-16 Years

Thesis

How to cite:

Laurent, Uthel (2008). Exploring the Schooling Experience of Disengaged Girls Aged 15-16 Years. MRes thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2008 The Author



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000f289>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

**EXPLORING
THE SCHOOLING EXPERIENCE
OF
DISENGAGED GIRLS
AGED 15-16 YEARS**

Submitted in part fulfilment for Master of Research in Education
The Open University

By Uthel Laurent, Bsc (Hons), PGCE

Submission date:
8 September 2008
Date of award:
14 November 2008

ProQuest Number: 13837967

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 13837967

Published by ProQuest LLC (2019). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives and schooling experiences of 15–16 year-old girls judged by their teachers to be disengaged. This research, which was based on an interactionist ethnographic approach, also served as a pilot for future research on disengagement. A sample of three teachers and five students participated in individual interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. The narrative-based thematic analysis yielded five main themes which reflected various aspects of the lived experiences of the girls.

The findings revealed that as students sought to create their sense of self they seemed preoccupied with certain interests which appeared to be more of a priority in their lives. The corollary was that school, though recognised for its instrumental value, appeared to be less relevant to them. As such, students showed signs of coping with their circumstances by engaging in behaviours consistent with various forms of disengagement from school and learning.

From an interactionist ethnographic approach, documenting the experiences of young people is crucial as their voices have great potential in shaping the future direction of educational research into school disengagement (Hammersley, 1999; Ball, 2003). In this regard, this project has great potential in paving the way for future research to illuminate the process of disengagement. Hence, the use of complementary sources of data might shed light on the structural influences and

social resources that pupils may draw upon to shape their student and self identity.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to all my family and friends who supported me in even in the smallest of ways during my studies. I encountered many obstacles during my studies, which I couldn't overcome without you.

I am indebted to my supervisors, Mr. Donald Mackinnon and Dr. Janet Collins who, against all odds and in such short time frame, provided much support and encouragement throughout the undertaking of my dissertation. Your assistance went a long way in boosting my self confidence and in helping me to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

I also extend my sincere gratitude to Professor Martyn Hammersley who has been a great source of guidance, assistance, comfort and motivation to me especially during my times of despair when I lost all hope. Thank you for going all out of your way to ensure that my physical, mental and psychological wellbeing was maintained during my study.

Above all, I thank the Lord God for giving me the health, strength, wisdom and understanding to see me through the completion of this research.

Table of Contents

Tables, Figures and Appendices	7
CHAPTER ONE.....	8
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	8
1.1 <i>Introduction</i>	8
1.2 <i>Background to Research</i>	9
1.3 <i>Aims and Objectives</i>	11
1.4 <i>Resume of the Chapters</i>	11
CHAPTER TWO.....	14
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
2.1 <i>Defining disengagement</i>	14
2.2 <i>Significance of disengagement</i>	17
2.3 <i>Disengagement and Identity</i>	20
2.4 <i>Justification for Qualitative research into disengagement</i>	21
2.5 <i>An examination of disengagement-related research</i>	24
CHAPTER THREE	28
METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION.....	28
3.1 <i>Research Methodology</i>	28
3.1.2 <i>The Ethnographic Approach</i>	29
3.1.3 <i>Educational Ethnography</i>	29
3.1.4 <i>Reflexivity</i>	30
3.2 <i>Research Design</i>	31
3.2.2 <i>Data Analysis</i>	34
CHAPTER FOUR	36
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS.....	36
4.1 <i>Data Collection</i>	36
4.1.2 <i>Recruiting the participants</i>	37
4.1.3 <i>Collecting data from participants</i>	39
4.1.4 <i>Ethical considerations</i>	40
4.2 <i>Data analysis</i>	41
4.2.1 <i>Data analysis Procedure</i>	41

4.2.2	<i>Analysis of Interview Data</i>	42
4.2.3	<i>Analysis of Case Narratives</i>	44
4.3	<i>Reflecting on Roxanne's behaviour</i>	58
CHAPTER FIVE		60
DATA INTERPRETATION		60
5.1	<i>Introduction</i>	60
5.2	<i>Discussion</i>	60
CHAPTER SIX		68
FINDINGS		68
6.1	<i>Introduction</i>	68
6.2	<i>Summary of Findings</i>	68
6.3	<i>Methodological issues</i>	69
6.4	<i>Limitation of research and implications for further research</i>	71
6.5	<i>Conclusion</i>	73
REFERENCES		74
APPENDICES		78

Tables, Figures and Appendices

Table 1: Potential Participants identified by teachers.....	34
Appendix 1: Dimensions of Disengagement.....	72
Appendix 2: Interview Schedules.....	73
Appendix 3: Excerpts from Transcribed Interviews.....	75
Appendix 4: Letter and Consent Form.....	80
Appendix 5: Letters of Research Approval.....	83
Appendix 6 Case Narratives of Students.....	87
Appendix 7: Modified Phases of Thematic Analysis	98
Appendix 8: Description of School and Catchment Area.....	99

CHAPTER ONE

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 Introduction

Disengagement from learning and school in general has been acknowledged by the British government as a major challenge for those directly concerned with the educational welfare of students (Steedman and Stoney, 2004). In this regard, Dr. Geoff Hayward, one of the directors of Nuffield 14-19 Review, in his presentation at the Engaging Youth Enquiry (2007) acknowledged that 'many young people face complex and diverse challenges and have needs and interests that have not been met by the education system over the last twenty years'. As such, disengagement among young people continues to be a reality in many British schools and, for some students, disengagement increases as they go through the school (Black, 2006). Thus, during this developmental stage of their lives, some of them become preoccupied in other interests. School seems to have little relevance in their lives and is given less priority. Consequently, these students appear to manifest various forms of behaviour consistent with disengagement from school and learning. In the context of pupil learning, the term disengagement has been used in various ways and may have different meanings to writers and researchers alike. It is therefore important to unpick the notions of disengagement if educationalists are to find ways to adequately tackle this

mounting problem. The definition and nature of disengagement will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

One drawback with much of the research into disengagement is that there is extensive use of statistics which rely on indicators such as truancy, drop-out or even exclusion to identify and deal with disengaged pupils. These quantitative measures are inadequate as they do not reflect the myriad ways in which disengagement is played out in school. Hence, this signals the need for more qualitative approaches to allow for a more holistic exploration of the process of disengagement. Another problem with current studies on disengagement is that most researches seem to gloss over female disengagement as insignificant in explaining school outcomes. Research seems to suggest that girls outperform boys in secondary schools and as such boys are more prone to disengagement than girls (McIntosh and Houghton, 2005). In this regard, this research sought to explore female disengagement at the secondary level as an under-researched area within the field of education.

1.2 Background to Research

My teaching experiences in Britain have been pivotal in carving the direction of my research. In the public secondary schools where I have taught, a number of students, particularly girls, appeared to show visible signs of disengagement from learning and continuously displayed what has seemed to me to be a dismissive

and uninterested attitude to school in general. Yet, my experience and observations at these school revealed that considerable effort was made to tailor learning to meet the needs of the students, and to improve school standards through curriculum changes and continuous assessment and monitoring. Alongside these school-based approaches, many other devised programmes of intervention have been directed at addressing barriers to learning, improving academic achievements and raising educational standards. Nonetheless, an abatement of disengagement is yet to be realised. In this regard, Broadhurst et al. (2005) argued that policy initiatives such as Sure Start, Connexions and Education Action Zone among others targeted at those most at risk of disengaging have proved to be inadequate. They contended that although these initiatives have been welcomed, there remains a sustained critique of government programmes. Hence, the plethora of these programme initiatives which have been emerging seem to suggest that current explanations do not target root causes of disengagement. Therefore, this calls for an exploration of disengagement by listening to the experiences of those pupils as a possible way forward.

Although the views of teachers, educators and other professionals may be significant in highlighting qualities of disengaged students, the most valid perceptions should come from those who are themselves key characters in this process. In this regard, pupils' voice is crucial in the exploration of the process of disengagement as they often have 'a rich but untapped understanding of

processes and events' (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000). When the views of these young people are considered then we can begin to fully understand their experiences and perspectives of school: the role of school in their lives as well as their adaptive responses to the process of schooling. Further, we can have more grounded information to allow for the identification of appropriate ways to cater for the needs of disengaged students. One suitable way to capture pupils' voice is by permitting them to describe views and feelings through the use of interviews which has been the data gathering instrument proffered in this research.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

This research aimed to explore the perspectives and schooling experience of disengaged girls aged 15-16 years. In keeping with the stated aims of the project, my research sought to answer the following questions:

- 1 What does a narrative-based thematic analysis reveals about the 'lived' schooling experiences in the lives of disengaged girls aged 15–16 years?
- 2 How effective are semi-structured interviews as data collection tools in conducting ethnographic research?

1.4 Resume of the Chapters

In Chapter Two, I present a literature review showing the complex character of disengagement. I also draw on the work of Lessard et al. (2008) and Pollard and

Filer (2005) to argue for the use of interviews and thematic analysis to capture the experiences of these young people.

Chapter Three provides a rationale for the use of the interviews within an interactionist perspective. Having reviewed the advantages of interviews and some of the problems surrounding their use, this chapter justifies the use of interviews as the preferred research instrument. It also argues for the use of a modified thematic analysis which is consistent with an ethnographic research tradition.

In Chapter Four I describe the procedures used for collecting and analysing the data. I also present an analysis of the students' perspectives of their schooling experience. The emerging themes showed that there is a need to understand what occurs in schools as well as how students live outside of school to fully understand their perceived disengagement to school and learning.

In Chapter Five I interpret the main findings in light of the research aims. Hence, I draw on the literature reviewed in Chapter Two as well as other literature to make sense of the first research question.

Chapter Six presents a summary of the main findings. It considers the second research question as well as methodological issues and limitations of the

research. It also puts forward some recommendations for future research. The chapter ends with a brief conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining disengagement

The literature has attested to the complex nature of the term disengagement which has been defined in many ways and has been opened to various interpretations. For instance, disengagement has been substituted for terms such as disaffection, disidentification, and alienation (Fredricks et al. 2004; Libbey, 2004; Williams and Pritchard, 2006). Disengagement has also been employed in the research literature as the antithesis to engagement (Marks, 2000; Fredericks et al. 2004; Smyth, 2006). Additionally, some writers conceived it in terms of a withdrawal from education or 'disconnection with academics' (McMillan, 2003; McIntosh and Houghton, 2005). While McIntosh and Houghton (2005) examined disengagement in terms of students' relationship to school, others such as Pollard and Filer (2005) saw it in terms pupils' relationship to learning. In spite of these various interpretations, some researchers appeared to be examining the same construct. Thus, McMillan's (2003) use of academic disengagement seemed to be similar to McIntosh and Houghton's (2005) use of educational disengagement as well as Broadhurst et al.'s (2005) school disengagement. In view of these conceptual issues, Libbey (2004) argued that the use of various terms to study school engagement [and disengagement] has created 'an overlapping and confusing definitional spectrum'. Likewise, Fredricks

et al. (2004) argued that current definitions of engagement [and disengagement] have incorporated such a wide variety of constructs that the term now 'suffers from being everything to everybody' (p. 84).

The literature has revealed three interrelated approaches to the study of disengagement which I summarised as context approach, dimension approach and predictor-outcome approach. Researchers who espoused a context approach analysed disengagement in terms of the context in which it occurred such as school and or classroom learning (Broadhurst et al. 2005; Pollard and Filer, 2005). Studies that emphasised a predictor-outcome approach used various measures to identify the disengaged as well as the consequences of disengagement. Such measures included absenteeism, achievement, dropout, exclusion, graduation, truancy, and underperformance, suspension (see Fredericks et al. 2004). Research that reflected a dimensional approach focused on behavioural, emotional and cognitive aspects of disengagement (Appendix 1). This approach elaborated in the work of Balfanz et al. (2007) formed the conceptual foundation of this study. In particular, Balfanz et al.'s (2007) use of the behavioural, cognitive and emotional dimensions helped to overcome the temptation to focus on a limited view of pupils' experiences as had been the case with the context or predictor-outcome approach. Hence, a dimensional view incorporated both a context and predictor-outcome approach. It was therefore expected to provide construct clarity and to overcome definitional and measurement problems.

Drawing upon Fredericks et al. (2004) review on student engagement, Balfanz et al. (2007) conceptualised disengagement as:

a high order factor consisting of correlated sub-factors measuring different dimensions of the process of detaching from school, disconnecting from its norms and expectations, reducing effort and involvement at school, and withdrawing from a commitment to school and to school completion (p. 224).

Such a multi dimensional definition found expression in this study as it was all embracing and covered several aspects of students' relationship (behaviour, attitude and experience) to learning and school. As elements of the process of disengagement, the notions of 'detaching' and 'disconnecting' conveyed the idea of emotional, mental or physical separation for the pupil, leading to a range of related consequences as identified within a predictor-outcomes approach. Hence, this holistic view of disengagement saw students' behaviour, cognition and emotions as an interrelated part of the individual and allowed for a rich characterisation of individuals (Fredricks et al. 2004). Additionally, this broad definition was compatible with my research which sought to explore students' schooling experiences. To this end, the use of ethnographic interviews grounded in students' perspectives allowed for a better understanding of the complexity of disengagement to school and learning.

2.2 Significance of disengagement

Disengagement among young people has seemed to be persisting and has been widely believed to be a growing problem in the western world. For instance, a review of research in nine European countries showed that the problem of young people's disengagement from education and learning was a shared concern (Kendall and Kinder, 2005). Additionally, Black (2006) noted that, in nearly every OECD* country the prevalence of disengagement varies significantly from school to school. Marks (2000) also claimed that disengagement is still a pervasive problem predominantly in US secondary schools where chronic disengagement reportedly afflicts 40%-60% of students, an estimate that excludes repeated absentees and dropouts. This view was echoed by Smyth (2006) who argued that 'students are switching off, tuning out and dropping out of high school in the USA and most other western countries at alarming rates' and 'reformers are at a complete loss as to what to do' (p. 285). With reference to the UK, McIntosh and Houghton (2005) argued that 'there remains a hard core of people who seem resistant to all efforts to engage in learning and these seriously disengaged seem to be impervious to change' (p. 9). As such, this persistence of disengagement was cause for concern and justified the need to carry out further research in that area.

* Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Internationally, much research has shown that school disengagement intensifies as students progress through secondary or high school (Marks, 2000; Steedman and Stoney, 2004; Black, 2006). Research also indicated that females are consistently more academically engaged than males (Marks, 2000; Fredricks et al. 2004; McIntosh and Houghton, 2005; Balfanz et al. 2007). Hence, a focus on girls was warranted at a time when current educational debates in the UK and other western countries seemed to remain highly concerned with the issue of boys' underachievement (see Archer et al. 2007).

Disengagement has been strongly associated with student and school outcomes and has provided information for designing interventions to improve the educational prognosis of students at risk (Finn and Rock, 1997; Libbey, 2004). For example, in the UK, the Rathbone/Nuffield 14-19 Review (2007) has sought to provide an improved understanding of the varying and complex needs, aspirations and experiences of those pupils most at risk of becoming educationally disengaged and how they could be supported. Although attention had been paid to the voices and experiences of pupils, the study considered those who were not in education, employment and training (NEET). By comparison, this study placed emphasis on documenting the experiences of those students who were still at school; it was hoped that this focus would have offered other dimensions to the exploration of disengagement that could help to inform more preventative rather than corrective measures.

Nevertheless, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in its 14-19 reforms has embarked on a new 14–16 re-engagement programme to tackle pre-16 pupils who are lower achievers or at the risk of disengaging. However, it seemed that schools, teachers and teaching became the object of critique and accountability and relatively less attention had been placed on examining the schooling experiences of students. This has led some researchers to argue that over the past twenty years or more educational policies have not been effective in meeting their stated purpose and have apparently proved to be futile (Smyth, 2006). As such, policy efforts have focused on poorly envisaged reprocessed formulas as well as ingenuous exploratory drives that need to be discarded (ibid).

Disengagement cannot be understated as it has serious social and financial implications for both the individual and society. Lessard et al. (2008) acknowledged research which indicates that disengaged young people would lack the competencies needed to integrate into the workforce, have difficulties finding work and suffer from psychological and emotional maladjustment (p. 26). Hence, there is need to ensure that the lives, knowledge, bodies and energies of young people are at the centre of the classroom and school to enable engaged learning to occur (see Black 2006). In addition, students need to feel that schooling is simply worth the emotional or psychological investment necessary to warrant their serious involvement in school (Smyth, 2006). This can only be done when their lives, experiences culture and aspirations are taken in consideration

instead of being ignored or trivialized (ibid). In this regard, this study is a timely contribution as it is a step closer in providing better diagnosis of the nature and extent of disengagement, which will pave the way for more effective ways of tackling this problem.

2.3 Disengagement and Identity

The notion of identity was of crucial importance to this study, which focused on documenting the views of young people. These individuals often struggle to come to terms with their situation as they concurrently strive to construct their sense of self and cope with developmental pressures characteristic of puberty. As such, Garnier et al. (2007) (cited by Lessard et al. 2008) argued that school disengagement is exacerbated in the period of adolescence where individuals face 'multiple problems'. This suggests that many challenges, including the onset of adolescence, may all combine to promote student disengagement. In this regard, Rudduck and Flutter (2000) contended that many young people find themselves involved in complex relationships and situations outside of the school context and some of them are accustomed to the responsibility and autonomy that their lives outside of school afford. Accordingly, Dwyer and Wynn (2001) argued that young people are much more than students; for many of them the other aspects of their lives are even more important. Smyth (2006) concurred and argued that 'school failure is inextricably bound up with the process of doing 'identity work'; where school is no longer seen as a viable place in which to do

identity work students drop out of school'. In this regard, Steinberg (1996) contended that some students view school as a nuisance and place it at the bottom of their list of priorities. He argued that their social lives seem to matter far more than their education and, for American students, disengagement is related more to the conditions of their lives outside of school than to what takes place within the school walls.

The above literature suggests that students' learning or disengagement choices form part of the wider construction of their sense of self. Hence, any identity issues cannot be adequately understood without giving voice to the young people whose lives are being affected. In this regard, Rudduck and Flutter (2000) argued that we should avoid the 'bracketing out' of young people's voice as this act 'is founded on an outdated view of childhood which fails to acknowledge children's capacity to reflect on issues affecting their lives' (p 86). The notions of identity and human agency are central to Symbolic Interactionism which formed the theoretical basis of this study, as explained in the following chapter.

2.4 Justification for Qualitative research into disengagement

This research sought to explore the nature of disengagement through the use of qualitative interviews intended to capture students' views on their schooling experiences. Studies which have focused explicitly on the issue of disengagement have tended to rely mainly on quantitative methods. For example,

in a review of thirty nine (dis)engagement studies by Fredricks et al. (2004), 28 of these were quantitative studies and only seven focused mainly on qualitative methods of data collection. This lends credence to the view there has been abundant published literature concerning the measurement of disengagement as predictors or outcomes of learning and schooling, and relatively less research about the subjective experience of young people.

One criticism levelled at current quantitative studies of disengagement is that they do not tap on qualitative differences in level of disengagement. For example, Fredricks et al. (2004) argued that the majority of studies make use of teacher rating scales and student self-report surveys which combine aspects of students' behaviour (such as conduct, participation and persistence) in one single scale. Such methods do not cater for differences in observed or reported behaviour and therefore do not allow for the analysis of subtle or more profound manifestations of disengagement (ibid). Additionally, these statistics yield a 'fragmented decontextualised picture' which may not be representative of the lived experiences of those involved in the process (see Smyth, 2006). Hence, there is need to study the human side to the stories that statistics do not tell by allowing youths a voice in describing their experiences (ibid).

Researchers have confirmed the need for rich insights provided by pupils' experiences and have argued for the exploration of school processes from pupils' perspectives. For instance, Fredricks et al. (2004) argued that thick contextual

descriptions are needed to enhance our understanding of phenomena [like disengagement]. These will help to explain individual and cultural differences and will shed light on why some students begin to disengage from school. Smyth (2006) and Lessard et al. (2008) also agreed with the use of qualitative methods to study the process of disengagement from the perspective of the participant.

Accordingly, Smyth (2006) argued that:

If we really want to understand phenomena like dropping out or disengagement from school and make dramatic inroads into them we need to access the meanings of these concepts... [and] explore them from the standpoint or positional lenses of the existential experiences of young people... (p. 288).

Smyth's (2006) view pointed to the fact that young people's experience can be relied upon as vital sources which can fuel change in schools. However, it must be noted that pupil's views should not be examined in isolation but in tandem with other avenues of reform as well. Nonetheless, this view justified the use of ethnographic research methods to highlight the diverse experiences of students deemed to be disengaged. In this regard, this research employed ethnographic interviews as a means of exploring what students say about their schooling and learning experiences.

2.5 An examination of disengagement-related research

Although not expressly concerned with disengagement, the work of Lessard et al. (2008) set the stage for the exploration of the nature of disengagement among young people. Lessard et al. (2008) saw disengagement as a gradual stage in the dropout process. In their research, they adopted semi-structured interviews to study school dropout. Following Seidman (1991), they employed an interview protocol to establish trust and build a rapport with participants as a means of encouraging rich descriptions. The transcribed interviews were reduced to shorter narratives which were then subjected to further analysis at a conceptual level. Lessard et al. (2008) concluded that the lived experiences provided a more vivid portrayal of the interplay of risk factors that determined the response adopted by the dropouts. The use of semi-structured interviews in this research was anticipated to offer a rich description of the extent of students' disengagement. Similarly, this research focused its initial analysis at a descriptive level through the use of narrative case studies depicting the experiences of students. However, unlike the work of Lessard et al. (2008), this study focused on documenting the experiences of disengaged students who were still at school and employed semi-structured interviews based on the work of Kvale (1996).

The work of Pollard and Filer (2005) ILP came close to my research initiative, but it was limited in certain respects. In contrast to Lessard et al. (2008), Pollard and Filer (2005) focused their research initiative in the UK. Like Lessard et al. (2008),

they did not set out to explore disengagement per se. Nonetheless, their research findings alluded to behaviours consistent with the process of disengaging from learning and can therefore be applied to a discourse on disengagement.

In their longitudinal ethnographic study called Identity and Learning Programme (ILP), Pollard and Filer (2005) sought to account for social influences on learning in compulsory secondary education, as young people develop through adolescence. The theoretical origins of their design lay in the tradition of symbolic interaction with the incorporation of emergent views or insights which would shed light on the issues being investigated. Thus, in keeping with symbolic interactionist views, their study pointed to the role of agency in shaping and maintaining students' sense of self and identity. The interactionist perspective also formed the theoretical platform of my research. Hence, this research drew upon the interactionist notions of 'agency' and 'identity' to enhance the understanding of students' disengagement.

Pollard and Filer (2005) examined students learning within the wider structural discourses of class and gender and had not conducted a detailed exploration of the nature of disengagement. In contrast, this study began at a micro level by documenting the perspectives of girls who had been identified by their teachers as disengaged. Although it can be argued that teachers' definition of disengagement may not be in keeping with students' definition of their situation, teachers' views served as a means of elucidating the complex nature of

disengagement. Further, given my previous teaching background, the use of teachers' definition avoided the temptation to impose my personal views on the analysis of the research data.

The ILP sample consisted of 17 students (eight girls and nine boys) from nine different secondary schools that were drawn from two different socio economic communities. Although that sample provided a platform to identify a variety of learning behaviour, the use of nine schools may have introduced other variables that could have influenced the findings. It was hoped that possible threats to validity was minimised in this research with the use of one school. In this light, my study took a more narrow focus, concentrating on girls from a specific catchment area who were all attending the same secondary school.

Pollard and Filer (2005) relied on a wide range of data collection tools which provided a rich source of data on which they based their findings. Like Lessard et al. (2008), they used a descriptive analysis involving the construction of rich narratives, which formed the basis for the use of theoretical modelling at the second level of analysis. By comparison, this study did not allow for the use of triangulated methods. Hence, in view of the scale of this project, I focused on assessing the feasibility of ethnographic interviews in providing substantial data that would shed light on the experiences of the students.

From their findings Pollard and Filer (2005) were able to deduce the characteristics of pupils that they classed as disengaged. They were also able to identify a typology of pupils' pattern of relationship, orientation and adaptive response to school which illustrated the complex nature of [dis]engagement. Additionally, Pollard and Filer (2005) found that students' learning experience and their perception of what it meant to be a learner were an integral part of their attempts to make sense of their lives. They also established that home, school and peer group factors all interacted to influence learner's identity as part of their wider construction of themselves.

My research question led me to direct my efforts at exploring disengagement as a multi dimensional construct. In this regard, instead of focusing on learning specifically, I considered students' disengagement to both learning and school in general. Further, the use of a narrative-based thematic analysis did not allow for the construction of a typology of disengagement but it paved the way for further exploration of the myriad ways in which disengaged students responded to school.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

3.1 Research Methodology

3.1.1 Introduction

This research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What does a narrative-based thematic analysis reveals about the 'lived' schooling experiences in the lives of disengaged girls aged 15–16 years?
2. How effective are semi-structured interviews as data collection tools in conducting ethnographic research?

These questions required information on how students perceived school and their learning, which offered a vivid portrayal of their experiences. Data was collected through the use of interviews and was subject to thematic analysis as part of an ethnographic research tradition. The first section of the chapter provides a rationale for the theoretical basis of this research. The second section assesses some possible methods that could be used within an ethnographic research design before outlining and justifying the preferred research design.

3.1.2 The Ethnographic Approach

This study employed an Educational Ethnographic Approach based on the theory of Symbolic Interactionism to explore students' perspectives of their schooling and learning experience. An Ethnographic Approach seeks to document what is going on in a particular situation or setting with a view to understanding other people's own world-view and to capturing detailed aspects of their social life (Taylor, 2006). This implies 'a commitment to a search for meaning, a suspension of preconceptions and an orientation to discovery' (Ball, 2003:32). There is much innovation and variety within recent ethnographic research as illustrated by the use of 'multiple approaches to data collection, analysis and project design' (Taylor, 2006). Hence, Ethnography ranges from the use of extended studies of communities to a relatively small scale projects in which the principal form of data is audio recorded talk (ibid). This variety is also reflected in the theoretical underpinnings as well. Accordingly, Hammersley (1999) has argued that the Interactionist Ethnographic Approach has changed over the years to reflect different challenges and thus allows for the integration of other ideas or methods that would help to shed light on the data.

3.1.3 Educational Ethnography

Educational Ethnography has been largely founded on the theoretical basis of Symbolic Interactionism. From an Interactionist Perspective, human actions are based on social or cultural meanings and individuals are seen as meaning makers, informing and shaping their social world (Hammersley, 1999). Hence,

an Interactionist Ethnographic Approach focuses on researching the perspectives, experience and actions of pupils but without abandoning the key role of the researcher (Hammersley, 1999; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Although the emphasis in most school ethnographies is almost entirely on classroom life, Ball (2003) has argued for a wider focus to allow researchers to know more about the lives of those that they study. This is important since students are not one-dimensional characters but may portray different selves in different settings. Thus, in order to understand the social life of students we need not only to concentrate on what takes place in the classroom but should also focus on other aspects of their lives as well. In light of Ball's (2003) view and in keeping with a focus on the multi dimensional conception of disengagement, this research considered other facets of students' lives out of the school that would help to shed light on their perceived disengagement.

3.1.4 Reflexivity

According to Ball (2003), the conduct of ethnographic work relies fundamentally on the social relations skills of the researcher which requires careful planning. Hence in this research it was necessary to consider the effects of reactivity that may have resulted from the interactions with participants. Being reflective allows researchers to reflect on their own interactions, feelings and make this clear in their report. Moreover, in view of the general criticisms of ethnographic work, Ball (2003) argued that reflexivity allows the researcher to connect the processes of data collection and data analysis to help ensure rigour in the research. Hence,

researchers should make sense of the research process by recounting the processes, problems, choices and errors that emerged during the fieldwork (ibid). This element of reflexivity was relevant to my research and was acknowledged during the conduct of the interviews, as explained in the following section.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Rationale for Research Instrument

The expressed aim of this research was to document the schooling experience of disengaged girls to shed light on the notion of school disengagement. In this regard, this study employed semi-structured interviews underpinned by guidelines described by Kvale (1996). Further, this research also served as a pilot to examine the feasibility of interviews in exploring educational disengagement from school and learning. Apart from the use of interviews, data for this research could have been collected through the use of observations, semi-structured questionnaires or documentary evidence.

Qualitative observation could have provided a rich description of behaviours and interactions in a specific natural setting rather than a numeric summary of occurrence or durations of observed behaviours. To fully understand the nature of disengagement and student experiences, I would have to observe students in a variety of settings both in and out of the school context. This would necessitate

successfully negotiating access, adopting a role as well as developing and maintaining trust with participants, which would not be possible in such short time frame. I would also have to consider the ethical issues involved in gaining parental consent for whole class observation even if the focus would be on observing some students within a classroom setting.

The use of personal and official documentaries could have added to the richness of the information gained on the extent of students' disengagement or to verify information given by other methods. However, on their own they would present an inadequate picture of the nature of disengagement. Also, given the scale of the project, semi-structured questionnaires could have been an appropriate data collection alternative. However, like documentaries, much vital information would be lost through this method thus limiting students' descriptions of their experiences.

Given time restraints, interviews seemed to be appropriate and practicable. Interviews are often chosen over other ethnographic methods because in addition to their economical value, they can generate information on motives behind actions and feelings (Seale, 1998). In particular semi-structured interviews can provide rich authentic insights into the actions, attitudes, beliefs and experiences of individuals and can inform about stable patterns of their behaviour (ibid). Unlike the semi-structured questionnaire, they allow for immediate follow-up and clarification of responses (Ary et al. 2006). This research advocated the use of

individual interviewing over other methods of interview. One reason is that it is not feasible to focus attention on a particular respondent in a focus group discussion. Hence, it is more beneficial to use individual interviews to gain richer details about personal experiences, decisions and actions (Gaskell, 2000). Additionally, some students may not readily participate in discussions and therefore much individual experiences may be lost during group interviews or focus groups discussions.

The reliance on interviews as a primary tool to document experiences has been challenged on methodological grounds. Critics have argued that interviews are essentially contextually situated social interactions where informants' responses are driven more by a preoccupation with self presentation and/or with the persuasion of others than with a view to providing accurate accounts (see Hammersley and Gomm, 2005). Hence, interview data are likely to be affected by error or bias and are accused of being contaminated by what takes place in the interview context, which render them useless for analytic purpose (ibid).

However, Hammersley and Gomm (2005) argued that interviews are no more likely to be affected by reactivity than other methods. Thus, these threats to validity do not render the interview inaccurate or invalid; nor do they deny the fact that people have unique personal experiences that they can talk about or that they have distinct sources of information that may not be immediately accessible to others (ibid). Hammersley and Gomm (2005) contended that at most, these

radical criticisms influence us to be more circumspect in the inferences drawn from interview data but do not rule out the use of interviews as a source of information.

In this regard, Hammersley and Gomm (2005) advocated the need to recognise the threats to interviews and to assess the interview data in light of these threats. They also advocated the need to be aware of the methodological and practical defects and to be reflective in the interpretation and analysis of the findings. This can be done by taking into account the sources of biases that can arise out of the interview context. This element of reflexivity is certainly in keeping with an ethnographic research process. For example, in this research it was necessary to consider the effects of reactivity during the conduct of the interview. This is because my ethnic and cultural status as a Black, non-British researcher might have affected how informants related to me in the interview context. However, it was anticipated that reactivity effects would be minimised due to the fact that I had previously taught in that particular school, and that the students already knew me as 'teacher'. It was hoped that this association would prove to be beneficial in building trust and rapport with the participants.

3.2.2 Data Analysis

In keeping with an ethnographic research tradition, the search for pattern proceeded through the use of a modified version of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Hence, as a preliminary stage, I constructed case narratives

grounded in students' experiences as a basis for the thematic analysis. This enabled me to be familiar with the data and was expected to facilitate the process of analysis. It was also anticipated that this phase would overcome the tendency to use the questions put to the informant as themes, a practice which has been cited as a pitfall of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis has the benefit of serving as a useful guide for researchers new to qualitative research and can be applied across a range of theoretical approaches (ibid). In this regard, thematic analysis can be endorsed as a 'flexible foundational method' that is suited for ethnographic studies with the aim of providing rich descriptions (ibid).

As a critical aspect of this research, the analysis and interpretation of the findings also took into account the sources of biases that arose out of the interview context. Such a reflective practice has been endorsed by both Ball (2003) and Gomm and Hammersley (2005).

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Data Collection

4.1.1 Phases of Data Collection

The data collection proceeded in two phases:

Phase One:

This phase set the stage for the selection of students, judged by their teachers to be disengaged, for participation in the project. This involved conducting interviews with teachers to gain their views on their experience of teaching Year 11 students, from which potential participants could be selected. The selected teachers all had daily contact with the Year 11 students. The teachers were interviewed during the last week of April, 2008.

A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 2) was drawn up, which included guiding questions focusing on two main areas:

- The context of research: - themes included professional background of the teacher, a description of the school, its catchment and intake.

- Teachers' description of the students: - comparing students from different ability groups in terms of behaviour, personality, performance, attitude, and background among other traits.

An hour long interview was conducted with a Science teacher (hereafter called Mr. Pritchard) who reported that he taught 110 of the 120 Year 11 cohort. He also served as Head of Science. In addition, two other teachers agreed to take part in a relatively shorter interview. One teacher (hereafter called Mrs. Baird) taught all the Year 11 students and served as Head of Religious Education (RE), while the other teacher (hereafter called Mr Douglas) served as a Year 11 Form Tutor. Excerpts from the teachers' interview transcript are presented in Appendix 3.

Phase Two

In this phase the participants were selected and interviewed. I employed a 'typical case' sampling method, a variation of purposive sampling, by selecting students who are considered by their teacher to be disengaged (see Ary et al. 2006). In this regard, sample selection was based on the analysis of information gathered from taped interviews with the three teachers. However, two other sources may have influenced my final decision, as will be explained shortly.

4.1.2 Recruiting the participants

As my first point of contact for conducting the field work, I met with the Head of Year 11 during the month of April, who supplied me with a list of potential

students to interview along with some performance data on some of these students. I consequently received advice from this Head of Year and Head of RE as to the students they believed would make good interview subjects. However, in selecting the sample I went against their advice in some cases and selected participants whom I perceived would best allow me to explore the process of disengagement. My final selection was based on students' performance and attitude to learning as gleaned from the teachers' reports. However, in retrospect, I felt that my prior knowledge of the student (whom I had taught) might have affected my selection as well. Table 1 below shows how the participants were selected.

Table 1: Potential participants identified by teachers

Student (Pseudonym)	Ability Group*	Head of Year	Head of Dep't Science	Head of Dep't RE	Form Tutor	Teachers' reasons for (non)selection	Final Selection by Researcher
Annette	1	√ GC	√ SC	√ LC	NA	Talks well	√
Elsa	3	√ GC	√ GC	√ GC	NA	Talks well	√
Emily	4	√ GC	NA	√ GC	NA	Talks well	X
Kate	2	√ GC	NA	NA	√ GC	Talks well	X
Marlene	3	√ GC	√ GC	X GC	NA	Absent often	√
Phyllis	3	√ GC	√ GC	X GC	NA	May not talk	√
Rachel	1	√ GC	√ SC	X LC	X GC	May not talk	√
Roxanne	3	X GC	√ GC	X GC	NA	Too quiet	√

KEY

√ = selected

X = not selected

NA = information not available

GC = Great Concern

SC = Some Concern

LC = Little Concern

* Selection based on ability rankings for science lessons ranging from Set 1-highest ability to Set 5- lowest ability.

The final sample consisted of six Year 11 girls drawn from Ability Sets 1 and 3, which had been the basis of Mr. Pritchard's discussion of disengagement. The sample reflected the catchment of the school being all White British-born individuals. Selected participants were met individually to discuss the nature of the projects including the ethical issues involved. Students were given an information booklet and consent form to read and take home for their consent as well as for parental or guardian consent (Appendix 4). Since, participation was voluntary students were given one week to decide whether they wanted to be interviewed. All consent forms were received, and students were interviewed during the second week in May, 2008. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes.

4.1.3 Collecting data from participants

Having selected the sample, another semi-structured interview schedule was drawn up (Appendix 2). It consisted of open-questions (as a guide) that would shed light on students' experiences of school and their learning. The schedule was not piloted but questions were discussed with supervisors and were modified to allow for fewer questions which were more open and less leading. My role as researcher-interviewer afforded me great flexibility during the interview to use probes and other appropriate questions to elicit responses from participants about their lived experiences. The interview took place a week after establishing contact with the participant. In consultation with the school receptionist, a meeting room located in the administrative block of the school was booked for the conduct

of the interviews. This provided a neutral setting where there were minimum interruptions. At the start of the interview, the participants were reminded of how the information that they provided would be used and were assured of the protection their data. They were also informed of their rights to decline to answer question which they felt were inappropriate and their right to withdraw from the interview if they did not wish to participate further. All students who attended the interview agreed to continue with the interview. However, one student was absent on the day of the interview and I was unable to interview her at a later date. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by me.

4.1.4 Ethical considerations

Data was collected at a school where I had previously taught. On my departure from that school, I had been assured by the head teacher that I could undertake my research there. Nonetheless, on November 13th, 2007, I sought written permission from the head teacher. I was given verbal research approval the following week and received a written consent on February 1st, 2008 (Appendix 5). Full ethical approval was obtained from the Open University Ethics Committee on March 13th, 2008 (Appendix 5). Throughout the data collection, the BERA (Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 2004) as well as the Open University Code of Practice for Research and those Conducting Research (both accessed 21.01.08) were followed. Prior to the interview, I discussed the major principles which would guide the conduct of the research with the participants.

These guides were also detailed in the information booklet provided for participants.

In this study, there were ethical issues involved in obtaining the informed consent of participants without the use of deception. Students were not informed of the basis of their selection. This was justified on the grounds that the harm that would arise from withholding information would be less than the harm involved in informing the participants of the reason why they have been selected. If they were told that they were perceived to be disengaged, this might have further demotivated them, affect their school performance and even their willingness to give truthful information during the research. The harm that could have been involved here seemed to be much greater than any minor infringement of the principle of informed consent involved in not telling them the basis for their selection. Nonetheless, the main components of informed consent were honoured throughout this research.

4.2 Data analysis

4.2.1 Data analysis Procedure

Data analysis was guided by a modified thematic approach which incorporated elements of a narrative methodology. Drawing on the ideas of Braun and Clarke (2006), Pollard (2007) and Lessard et al. (2008), I adopted a two-stage analytic framework which was grounded in the experience of students. The first stage,

which was based on the work of Pollard (2007) and Lessard et al. (2008), focused on the production of narrative cases for each student. Hence, the transcribed interview data were reduced to short descriptive stories for each student which sought to capture the essence of their perspectives and experiences (Appendix 6). Such narrative practices were useful as they made the data more manageable and eased the struggle to identify patterns in the students' stories (Pollard 2007). However, the time frame and scale of the project made it impractical to have the stories validated by the students. The second stage of the process of analysis involved the use of an abridged version of thematic analysis derived from the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) which is shown in Appendix 7. The thematic analysis which proceeded meticulously from the case narratives yielded five significant themes which are explained below.

4.2.2 Analysis of Interview Data

Setting

As an important aspect of ethnographic studies, a discussion of the setting or context provided the background against which the students' perspectives and experiences of disengagement could be understood. While students' interview data revealed relevant background information about themselves, teachers' interviews provided an account of the school, its intake and its catchment area

(see Appendix 8). Throughout the report all proper names of places and people used were pseudonyms.

Pupils' Description

Annette, Elsa, Rachel and Roxanne began their secondary school experience at Redmoor Community High School (RCHS) from Year Seven. By comparison, Marlene and Phyllis entered Redmoor in Year Ten. All the girls except Marlene lived in the school catchment area. Annette lived with her mum, Elsa and her older brother lived with their parents, Phyllis and her older sister lived with their dad, and Marlene lived alone with her boyfriend. Rachel provided no information about her home background.

Annette, Phyllis and Rachel all saw themselves in a positive way. They all said that they were 'outgoing'. In particular, Annette described herself as 'someone who does not take life so seriously' and who tried 'to be open and have fun'. Likewise, Phyllis liked talking to people and making friends. By comparison, both Elsa and Marlene portrayed themselves in a negative way. Elsa described herself as 'dozy, loud, annoying, stubborn, bad, naughty and horrible'. Marlene described herself as 'miserable'; however, when prompted she added that 'I can be a laugh'.

The school's catchment and its intake

RGHS is a mixed 11-16 secondary school located in the West Midlands region of England. Further, RGHS is a non-denominational secondary school whose intake is of predominantly White British background from working class catchments. The school is an open access secondary co-educational school located in a middle class area. However, the majority of students are 'bussed in' from the surrounding rural areas. RGHS was undergoing structural changes under the current leadership. However, in view of the scale of this project, it was not possible to counteract any possible special circumstances that would arise from the use of this single school.

4.2.3 Analysis of Case Narratives

The analysis of the students' narratives revealed five major themes which seemed to be of particular importance. These themes, which included School Life, Social Life, Home Life, Work Life and Other Interesting Life, reflected aspects of the various lived experiences as perceived by the girls. Thus, they provided a rich insight into the interests and preoccupations of young people as well as the extent to which school was important to them.

School life

The girls' experience of school life was analysed in terms of the value they placed on school, their feelings about school and their attitude to learning.

The importance of school

All the girls talked about the importance of school as a place for learning and socialising as well as a means of getting GCSE's to go to college or get a job. For Annette, success at school would allow her to go to university especially since no other family member had done so. Additionally, this would allow her to have enough money to 'afford things'. Elsa also recognised that she could not do without school especially since 'there are people who do not even get a chance to come to school'. For Marlene school 'is alright' and 'good' but 'it depends on the attitude you give when you walk through the doors'. Rachel also believed that 'school is alright' even if 'they teach you a lot of pointless stuff'. Phyllis acknowledged that school 'should be a priority'. She recognised that 'school is good' and that 'it prepares you for everything', 'it makes you realise' and 'it makes you think'.

The account of the value that the girls placed on school is of particular importance. Their recognition of the value of school bears little relation to their feelings about school. A plausible explanation might be that the girls' values may have been shaped by wider societal beliefs about the instrumental values of school. By comparison, their feelings about school might have been constructed

from their daily social interactions at home, school and in society and form part of their character.

Feelings about school

The girls' commitment to school was shown in their general feelings towards the school. In their account Elsa, Phyllis and Rachel all openly showed their dislike for school. Elsa repeatedly acknowledged her lack of commitment to school and voiced her dislike of school when she stated that 'I've never really been very keen into school', 'I'm not into school', 'I've never been into academics' and 'I've never really wanted to come to school from the time I was in little school'. Mr. Pritchard also reasoned that 'school is where she comes before she goes home; the next real part of it is when she gets home'. Likewise, Rachel reported her dislike of school when she stated that 'I don't really like school', 'I don't look forward to coming to school', and 'I just don't like it'. Similarly, Phyllis 'never liked' her 'old school' and her 'primary school'. She consistently reported that 'I do not like school from the time I was little'. She has always wanted to grow up to be an adult. Nonetheless, Phyllis was the only girl who took part in any extra-curricular activities. She also represented the school at sporting events.

Attitude to learning

The girls' commitment to school or lack of it could have affected the way they responded to instructions and how they behaved during lessons. The girls

appeared to display a poor attitude to learning and therefore appeared to be underachieving. The level of involvement in lessons varied for each girl.

Annette liked exciting lessons involving a whole range of activities. If the lessons were not interesting she 'would just have sat there'. Mrs Baird saw Annette as 'one of these girls... that has her own agenda [who] is quite difficult to keep motivated always'. Mr Pritchard noted that Annette 'is just unorganised' and 'can be quite upset sometimes in lessons about things that are going on'. He put her underachievement down to lack of revision, the poor standard of her course work and her inability to 'engage during lessons despite the scaffolding she is receiving'.

Elsa's dislike of school was played out in her lessons. Elsa believed that some lessons were 'a waste of time' and there was no point in doing them since she would never use them. She tried to work most of the time and acknowledged that she was the one 'not really putting her mind to it'. Elsa got bored easily at school; if a lesson was uninteresting she would 'sit and daydream'. She never really did home work because she had 'never really seen the point in doing it'; she believed that 'school is school' and 'home is home'. Mr Pritchard believed that Elsa 'is a concern'. He recounted that 'she never has a book, never has a pen and always turns up late for lessons; she does no revision and is reluctant to produce much work in lessons even though she will try to engage a bit'. Mrs Baird saw Elsa as 'mouth almighty' and 'very immature'. Her account was that Elsa was a 'bright

but downright lazy' girl who 'basically tries to disrupt the class by shouting out all the time'.

Marlene was very concerned about her teachers and their teaching. Marlene reported that 'the teachers do not take time to teach people' and 'can make it difficult'. For example, her History teacher 'talks for ages' and 'you can't keep track of it'; Also, her Graphics teacher 'takes half an hour to come to you and then she shouts at you because you have done no work'. On the contrary, Marlene enjoyed English because the teacher used humour which allowed you to 'probably take in what the teacher is saying and learn from it'. She also liked practical subjects that allowed you to 'do more stuff and see what you are doing'. Marlene reported that she got 'bored' in most of her lessons. Sometimes she walked in and listened to what the teacher was saying. She worked in lessons depending on what mood she was in. If she was 'stressed' 'about things at home or people' then she 'switches off' and 'won't work' and consequently 'won't answer questions'.

Phyllis also found a few of the teachers unfair at times. She liked English, found Geography difficult and struggled in Science. She reported that she started 'messaging about' when she got unfocused in lessons. Nonetheless, she was able to sit down in her room and do some homework at nights. Mrs Baird reported that she saw little of Phyllis who 'has been in and out of school'. She also noted that Phyllis did little work and when she was with Marlene she got no work done. Mr

Pritchard saw Phyllis as 'a thorn in his side', 'a real concern' and someone who 'is not interested the slightest'. He reported that Phyllis 'never has a pen or a book, is very mouthy and rude to staff, wants to chat to her friends during lessons, and is really unhappy when she is made to work'.

Mr. Pritchard reported that Rachel 'sometimes arrives in lessons not really in a frame of mind for it' and that she 'cannot engage' despite the scaffolding given. To Rachel, some lessons like English were 'boring' and she did not need to know about subjects like Chemistry to do hairdressing. Rachel seemed to display a lackadaisical attitude during lessons. She attended most lessons and occupied herself by just doing 'doodles and stuff like that' and she reported that she was not bothered by the teachers. Rachel hated studying and had not done homework for 'ages'. This had been confirmed by both Mrs. Baird and Mr. Pritchard. Mrs. Baird reported that 'it's doing the work at home that's a problem' and Mr. Pritchard noted that 'she simply isn't doing anything at home'.

Change

The interview data revealed that some elements of change were seen in all the girls towards the end of their secondary school journey. Mr. Pritchard believed that both Annette and Rachel were underachieving for a significant period of time in Year 10 and 'they are starting to come around' in Year 11. Rachel had already gotten her Maths at GCSE level and believed that she was 'not going to fail her GCSE's'. Annette herself reported that 'half-way through Year Ten I have grown

up a lot and, looking back, I could have tried harder and should have taken some things more seriously'. As exams were approaching she revised with her friend because she wanted to do well so that she could say that 'she tried'.

Elsa recounted that 'I am not proud of what I was doing'. She documented that 'I had my head down in Year Seven'. Things took a turn for the worse in Year Eight when she became part of the 'wrong crowd' and started 'faffing about'. Elsa reported that as she was in Year 11 she was 'maturing' since she was no longer in the 'wrong crowd'. This contrasted to the views of Mr. Pritchard who believed that Elsa 'still hangs around with the undesirable elements'. Elsa recounted that with the help of her learning mentor she made the change in her behaviour, which resulted in 'just the odd letter being sent home'.

Likewise, Marlene reported that her attitude changed from Year Ten: 'I used to get E's and D's and now I'm getting A's and B's 'in my course work and everything so I think that I've done good'.

Mr Pritchard and Mrs. Baird recognised some element of change in Phyllis. Mr Pritchard reported that Phyllis started to produce some reasonable work which led him to wonder if this was really her work. Mrs Baird also reported that she saw another side to Phyllis 'where she was polite, asked the right questions as if she wanted to work'. Phyllis herself reckoned that 'I wished that I had tried more sometimes and worked hard'. She thought that it was her fault that she had not

done as well as she could of and believed that she would pass a few subjects at GCSE level.

Social life: peer groups and socialising

It was clear from the interview data that all the girls valued their friendship with peers. School was seen as a main site for forging relationship with friends and maintaining constructive friendship ties. However, in one case there was evidence of the negative influence of peers on behaviour at school. Whereas the teachers believed that all the girls associated with students at school who had a negative influence on their learning, the girls themselves perceived their friendship differently.

Annette came to this secondary school because 'mainly that's where all [her] friends from primary school went'. Annette reported that 'if I had no friends it would be horrible' and 'things would have been completely different'. To Annette, 'school is not just a place for learning but also a place to get to meet friends and to develop 'social skills'. Although Annette had school friends, she had closer male friends out of school, whom she found easier to get on with since 'you don't get the bitchiness you get with girls'. A lot of Annette's friends were older than she was and she learned a lot of things from them especially 'stuff about life'. Annette saw her friends most days and went out with them two or three times during the week as well as on Friday and Saturday nights.

It appeared that socialising was very important to Elsa especially since she got 'dead bored easily' in the house. Although she went out with the girls in Year 11, Elsa mainly socialised with girls who had already left school as they were 'a lot more mature'. Elsa appeared to be discreet in her form of socialising. She expressed disgust at teenagers who sat on the street. Rather, socialising took the form of going out and spending time at her mates' house. In particular, they 'pop down to the pub to have a drink' if they were not doing anything, or if they were having a lot of drinks, they went 'round to someone's house'. Although inconsistent in her account, Elsa reported that she went out 'any day really' and that her curfew was at approximately ten thirty at nights.

Elsa's peer group account stood out because she documented the negative influence of the groups that she once associated with. She recounted that her poor behaviour in school had been due in part to her 'being part of the wrong crowd' and 'following people she shouldn't hang around with'. This caused her to start 'faffing about' to the point where she 'didn't even put her head down'. However, she reported that her mates in Year 11 were 'all not dead keen to work [in school] and were all 'fed up of school' because 'they've got to go'. Her friends showed that they 'can't be bothered' with school by 'not coming in' or 'leaving the school premises and not coming back'.

Marlene looked forward to coming to school everyday to see her mates, who helped her to understand the work. She liked going out with her mates and

missed her friends. She had some friends where she lived because she once lived there with her mum. As she had her own home she saw little of her friends; however, she managed to go out with them on Friday nights, when she could.

Phyllis liked seeing her friends at school. She remarked that, 'although school should be a priority I put socialising first'. Phyllis reported that 'I'm friends with loads of people and there is not one person in the year who I dislike'. She saw her friends after school and went out with them on Fridays. She liked going out when she was 'stuck in the house and feeling a bit down'. Her father also liked her going out 'a couple nights a week and encouraged her to do so.

In the exchange with Mr. Pritchard, he reported that Rachel 'doesn't get involved in anything outside of lessons' and 'she is more interested in her social life outside of school'. Rachel herself saw school as a place to meet with her friends. She reported that 'I get on with everyone at school, I just don't care much about the people at school, I speak to them when I choose'. Rachel remarked that after school she and her friends hanged out at her boyfriend's house.

Home life

In four of the cases, there seemed to be a strong attachment to family and home life. Hence, home life might have had an effect on classroom behaviour and concentration on class tasks. The girls talked about having a close rapport with certain family members as a means of obtaining the love, help, support and

motivation, which appeared to be lacking at school. Hence, home relations might have served to boost their confidence and raise their self esteem. Additionally, the home was also the site for the inculcation of important values for the girls. The degree of home bond varied for the girls.

Annette's family meant 'everything' to her. As she got older she developed a relationship with her mum which was 'not an overnight thing'. This relationship helped to instil in her the values of respect, trust and honesty which consequently gained her 'freedom' and 'trust' to do things'. Annette described herself using these qualities which had been built into her character.

Elsa felt 'deep within' that her parents loved her. She recognised the values of 'being independent' and 'saving her money' which her mother had taught her. Elsa believed that she and her mum 'are exactly the same' in that they 'never really liked school'. Elsa reflected on the problems that her behaviour at school has caused her family. She wanted to make her parents proud even if she doubted that she had done so. Her poor behaviour was 'a massive shock to her mum' who thought she 'would turn out like her "really, really quiet" brother'. Additionally, 'falling into the wrong crowds' and 'getting letters home' were 'stressing her mum' and causing 'a lot of upsets with her mum and dad'.

Despite being 'kicked out of her dad's house' and not seeing or having a relationship with her mum, Marlene saw herself as a 'family person'. Although,

she lived with her boyfriend, she kept in close contact with her Nan, her father's mother, who had motivated her to continue her cooking: 'my Nan told me I can be a good cook or chef because I can cook anything'.

Phyllis did not want to 'fall out' with her dad. He had 'motivated her to do a lot of things' like playing football. He ensured that she did not drink the night before a game and ate the right foods for her sports. These instructions remained with Phyllis and became a part of her daily routine. Her dad also allowed her to socialise but kept her from associating with the 'wrong crowd'. Phyllis spent time with her dad by 'staying in some nights and making him some tea'.

Rachel made no reference to her family but acknowledged her boyfriend who she saw most days when she was not at work. After school, she went home to change and spent the rest of her time at his home. She also went out with him on Sunday nights.

In summary, family members were seen as a source of motivation for the girls which might have helped in the construction of their sense of self. Additionally, the girls' preoccupation with family relationships and home life might have been a cause of the decreased attention given to school activities. Hence, home factors might have served to either encourage or prohibit attitudes and behaviours consistent with disengagement.

Work life and other interesting life

The girls showed an interest in other areas of life that appeared to take precedence over school and learning, either wholly or partially. Elsa and Rachel placed priority on their work life, Marlene was committed to her home life, Phyllis' loyalty laid with sports and Annette was highly committed to her friends.

Elsa clearly stated that 'I prefer to work better than school as learning is not my thing'. She held a job as a Kitchen Assistant for approximately six months which she saw as 'not a big job' but 'better than nothing'. She also had another job lined up in a Care Home which she would begin after she completed secondary school. Elsa took the initiative in securing the jobs by 'ringing up'. Having a job allowed her to 'have things now instead of waiting for Christmas', 'to do things on her own and not claim other people's money'. She was of the view that 'if you get your own things and be more independent it is better'.

Rachel's life was centred on her hairdressing career. She had been working in a hairdresser's shop since she was fourteen years old. She worked on Wednesdays to Fridays from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Rachel saw work as a means of getting money and 'getting something to do instead of sitting home all the time doing nothing' and instead of 'being lazy' and getting other people's money. Rachel wanted to go 'straight to work' when she left school. She felt that she was denied the opportunity of pursuing further

training in hairdressing at college and argued that 'instead of school I would have liked to spend my days working'.

Marlene lived in her own home and was highly committed to her home life. She enjoyed cleaning, cooking and keeping the house together 'even if it gets on her nerves'. When her boyfriend went to work at nights she could have done whatever she wanted. However, she spent her nights cooking, cleaning and doing some homework. Marlene's commitment to her home life left her little time to see her friends or to socialise.

Phyllis was strongly committed to the development of her sporting talents and took football 'quite serious'. She went to football training after school and played for the FA. In preparation for her games she heeded her father advice; she also ensured that she was in good physical health by not smoking and being sensible about drinking. Phyllis' passion for sport was shown in her future career move. She wanted to go to college to do Sports Science or wanted to be a Health and Fitness Trainer or a Dietician. In the exchange, she remarked that 'in the meantime I prefer to start working and if I want to go to college I know what I want to do'.

It was interesting to note that the girls' description of their work life and other areas of interest were unprompted accounts which emerged out of the interview and about which they felt at ease talking. This might have

been an indication of their preoccupation with immediate concerns, which might help to explain the decline in their commitment to school life and consequently their apparent disengagement.

4.3 Reflecting on Roxanne's behaviour

I was unable to have an interview with Roxanne and I had little background or school data for her. However, I included her in the analysis because of certain striking qualities identified by her teachers that made her stand out among the other girls. The description of Roxanne as given by Mrs. Baird and Mr. Pritchard was suggestive of negative qualities. Roxanne was depicted as 'a very, very quiet student' suffering from dyslexia. She was 'isolated' within her science group and sat 'on her own by choice'. 'She did not take part in anything' and her 'communication skills' were weak. These qualities were seen to affect her performance and to be responsible for her perceived disengagement. However, Collins (1996) has argued that the child who is 'quiet' at school may not necessarily be so in other social settings and may even be perceived differently. Hence, in light of insufficient information on Roxanne one can only speculate as to whether these perceived qualities were circumstantial: being played out in school only or in other social situations as well.

Another interesting bit of information about Roxanne was that she was absent on the day of the interview, after having been informed of the venue for the interview at the beginning of the week. Roxanne's action raised questions about reasons

for her absence since absenteeism has been cited by writers such as Marks (2000) and Balfanz et al. (2007) as a manifestation of school disengagement. However, one cannot be sure of the true nature of the circumstances surrounding Roxanne's absence. Thus, this points to the limitations of relying solely on one interview as the main data gathering tool especially for ethnographic studies where the aim is to gather information that would help shed light on the participants' social world. In this regard, there is need to use multiple interviews or have triangulated methods as part of the study to gain additional information that would shed light on emerging issues.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA INTERPRETATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the first research question which addresses the information gathered from the narrative-based thematic analysis. It offers some interpretations regarding students' experience of schooling and learning in light of the literature review.

5.2 Discussion

The narrative-based thematic analysis of the interview data revealed the following results about the experiences of disengaged girls:

Most girls showed a strong dislike of school. Their report showed that throughout their school life they saw school as a 'condition for existence', a term used by Brown (1987) to refer to a situation whereby pupils attend school because attendance is compulsory and therefore they must attend often to avoid prosecution. Accordingly, Smyth (2006) argued that for some American students 'euphemistically classified as being disengaged ... 'schooling has become completely banal, meaningless and without purpose, except as a reasonably pleasant place in which to meet and socialise with one's friends' (p. 286). In this

regard, the girls reported that school functioned as a site for socialising and entertaining other peer group activities. Bukowski et al. (1996) highlighted the benefits of such experience when he noted that apart from peer acceptance friendship is seen as one of life's most rewarding interactions which, occurs on a daily basis as a key aspect of the social and emotional development of children and adolescents.

The girls showed a strong commitment to their peer group even though they appeared to make independent choices in their lives regarding their learning and future careers. The literature supported the link between peer group and learning. For example, Black (2006) documented that students who are engaged feel accepted by their peers. Further, Pollard and Filer (2005) noted that a pupil's learner identity was shaped by peer group influences. My findings showed that only one student reported the impact of negative peer influence on her learning which may have been due to the small number of cases I studied. Additionally, my research focus did not allow me to explore this issue. Nonetheless, this discovery may well inform about the range of ways in which students respond to learning and their school.

The analysis also showed that the girls' identity construction was influenced in part by their relationships with particular family members as well as other home experiences. Hence, family relationships affected the girls' interests and preoccupations, and family values became engrained in them to the extent that

as they constructed their identity they drew upon these aspects of their home socialisation. Such home influences were cited by Pollard and Filer (2005) as an important aspect of the construction of pupils' learner and self identity which enabled them to cope with their circumstances.

Apart from home influence, the girls' class and ethnic status may have shaped their disengagement attitudes and behaviours. The girls were all of White British background and were seen by their teachers to be from working class communities. Research has shown that in the UK, White British pupils have the highest rate of underachievement of all the ethnic groups (McIntosh and Houghton, 2005) and that among nine European countries including England, home background and area of residence were seen to be key influences on disengagement (Kendall and Kinder, 2005). Research by Pollard and Filer (2005) also confirmed how pupils' sense of themselves and their lives were shaped and reshaped by experiences in the home, school and community and in relationship with their home, school and peers. These social influences can either facilitate or hinder an individual's commitment to school and learning. However, in view of inadequate information on the socioeconomic status of the girls, judgements made about such claims would have to be suspended. Rather, further research would have to be conducted to explore the effects of ecological and socioeconomic factors on students' decision to disengage.

The findings showed that the girls talked about accepting some of the classroom and school norms but that they exhibited behaviours consistent with behavioural,

cognitive and emotional disengagement. For example, although some girls accepted school rules regarding punctuality and attendance, they ignored classroom rules about being equipped and prepared for lesson and completing home work tasks. These behaviours have been identified by Smyth (2006) and Balfanz et al. (2007) as elements of a wide spectrum of disengagement, which Black (2006) saw to be prevalent in every OECD country. Furthermore, some girls demonstrated what I referred to as 'contextualised educational disengagement' where they were committed to learning in particular lessons; they strategically chose which lessons to display behaviours consistent with disengagement. Other girls appeared to be disengaged in most lessons and from the institution of school itself.

The girls talked about making the decision to disengage as a behaviour option. They also talked about how they showed signs of actively disengaging from school and/ or classroom learning. In this sense at least, disengagement was seen as a choice rather than a state influenced by circumstances or factors over which they have little or no control. Additionally, the findings revealed that even though the girls appeared to be disengaging from school or learning they appeared to be highly 'engaged' in other activities. They were committed to other activities which they placed as a priority, as these interests appeared to them to be more important than school.

The literature both in the US and the UK clearly revealed the importance of other interests in the lives of those judged to be disengaged. Writers such as Steinberg (1996), Rudduck and Flutter (2000), Dwyer and Wynn (2001), Fredricks et al. (2004) Smyth (2006) and Lessard et al. (2008) all highlighted the attention that students give to non-school interests as they seek to create their own identity. Hence, young people may dedicate more time and effort to other activities with the corollary that school might no longer be a priority. In this regard, the girls' choice of learning strategy and career path was impacted upon by non- school 'situated learning' experiences (see Lave and Wagner, 1991).

The students' response also showed that the decision to disengage could take place at any phase of the compulsory school years and, for some students the process intensified during the secondary school years. This result was consistent with the findings of Black (2006) which showed that in OECD countries disengagement was particularly evident in the crucial middle years of school where schooling experiences are at odds with the experiences of adolescence. However, an interesting discovery was that the girls completed their secondary schooling which was contrary to the findings presented by Smyth (2006) and Lessard et al. (2008). They both saw disengagement from schools in Canada and the USA as part of a process which ultimately ended in school dropout. One plausible explanation for this inconsistency may be that in the UK, there are greater sanctions attached to defiance of the formal school norms which work to prohibit actions such as absenteeism and truancy by students. Consequently,

stricter measures have been put in place to deal with the norms relating to attendance and punctuality. This evidence has been confirmed by Broadhurst et al. (2005) who cited punitive interventions such as parenting orders and prosecution as compelling forces to comply with attendance policies. It may also be that some pupils are excluded at an earlier age and pupils who are still in school by the age of fifteen are more likely to stay. Conversely, it can be argued that there was no indication of the extent of exclusion or absenteeism in the UK and perhaps not all cases may be reported on records such as Missing Children Register and Out of School Register in the UK.

All the girls talked about school in instrumental terms as a means of advancing their academic or vocational careers. The girls also talked about making changes in their behaviour as they approached the end of their secondary school year with some accepting the blame for their academic performance and attitude to learning. This resonated with the work of Pollard and Filer (2005) who acknowledged the important changes made by students in their approach to learning as GCSE was imminent. Pollard and Filer (2005) also found that students strategically targeted their efforts towards subjects perceived to be of relevance to their future career aspirations. However, in this research, there did not appear to be evidence to show that, for all students, their strategic efforts were geared towards subjects relevant to their future career aspirations. Rather, it appeared that the girls wanted something to show that they were not the under-performers that they have been demonstrating during their time at secondary

school and that they were capable of doing well. For four of these girls, their planned future career did not appear to depend on their GCSE grades. The exception to this was Annette who wanted to move on to college and university. It would be interesting to follow the career paths of the girls to document any changes made in their choices.

It may be significant that most girls identified career moves which were practically or vocationally based, were in keeping with their dominant interests, and for which training was lacking or denied. This finding was quite interesting in view of the fact that UK and European based studies have focused attention on programmes such as alternative educational initiatives, GVNQ and vocational GCSE as a means of tackling disengagement. These initiatives have been undertaken in view of evidence which pointed to the perceived irrelevance of the curriculum in the lives of many young students (Steedman and Stoney, 2004; Kendall and Kinder, 2005). In this regard, Kendall and Kinder (2005) noted that a common influence on disengagement in the UK is the fact that vocational education does not have parity of esteem with academic qualifications. Hence, the division between vocational and academic education often results in student being given courses that are inappropriate for meeting their learning needs. As such, they called for a revision of the curriculum and the offer of alternative curriculum (including accreditation) to match individual learning styles and make it more relevant to the needs of disengaged students. However, some concern has been raised about the reliance on vocational education. Kendall and Kinder

(2005) noted that there is the need to avoid falling into the trap of seeing vocational education as the solution to disengagement, as is believed to be the case in England. Additionally, I believe that provisions which target 'the group who can benefit the most' (Steedman and Stoney, 2004) are discriminatory and as such may not reach some of the disengaged students who need them.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the main findings relating to the first research question. It also considers the second research question which addresses the effectiveness of interviews in conducting ethnographic research along with some methodological issues arising from the research. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the research as well as the implications for future research.

6.2 Summary of Findings

A thematic analysis of the girls' narratives suggested that disengagement might have been a deliberate choice taken to cope with circumstances in their lives. The girls drew upon home, school and peer group relationships and experiences to make sense of their lives. Most girls seemed to be preoccupied with other interests relating to their planned future career, which appeared to be a priority for most of them. Hence, school appeared to have less relevance in their lives.

The girls saw school in instrumental terms as a site for socialising and peer group activities, and as a means of advancing their future careers. Nonetheless,

investing in education did not appear to be of immediate personal and economic benefit to most of them. Hence, their disengagement seemed to be 'contextualised' where they were unwilling to engage in particular lessons. Nonetheless, the girls reported changes made in their behaviour towards the end of their secondary school journey.

6.3 Methodological issues

Given the time frame and scope of the research, the semi-structured interview proved to be effective in gathering data that were grounded in the experiences of the students. Additionally, the use of individual interviews was useful in capturing the personal views of students, which would have probably been lost if focused group discussions or group interviews were used. The use of thematic analysis was effective in eliciting rich insights into the lives of the student. Theoretically, the thematic analysis supported the use of the interactionist ethnographic approach to explore the nature of disengagement since it permitted the examination of the resources that students drew on in their relationships with others to make sense of their lives. Hence, in keeping with an ethnographic tradition, it should be recommended as a foundation for future research on disengagement.

The conduct of this school-based research was a stressful experience which necessitated working around the tight administrative and teaching schedules,

especially since it was unfeasible to carry out fieldwork after school. This required negotiating and renegotiating access with teachers and students in an effort to set up the interviews. During my fieldwork, I encountered a situation where the interviews with two teachers and a student had to be rushed because of their other commitments. Such a situation could result in loss of potentially vital data. The above issues also raise concern about the physical and mental preparation needed for conducting ethnographic research in busy places like schools which Ball (2003) addressed as part of developing and maintaining the 'skilful self' of the researcher.

An ethical issue that arose during the research was that I was approached by a student who questioned why the chosen participants were all 'lazy' students. I gave what I thought was a satisfactory answer by informing her that I was interested in students' views about their experience at school and by making the effort to approach me was a means of ensuring that she was comfortable to participate in the project. In light of this emerging issue, at the start of the interviews all participants were reminded of their rights to withdraw from the project or decline to answer questions that they are uncomfortable with and were reassured of the protection of the information they would provide.

6.4 Limitation of research and implications for further research

This research sought to explore the issue of disengagement within a single school of predominantly white British background, in working class communities, based on interviews held with five girls. Hence, in view of the nature and size of the sample, the findings cannot be generalised to other schools. Additionally, given that this research narrowly focused on the disengagement among White British girls of working class background, future research should consider how the discourses of class and ethnicity impact on students' learning and disengagement. In this regard, the sample should incorporate more ethnically diverse schools drawn from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

One of the drawbacks to this research was that in view of some inconsistencies in some of the students' responses it was not possible to for me validate the participants' responses, as suggested by Ball (2003), due to time constraints. Hence, for future research it is recommended that the data be strengthened by the use of multiple interviews with students to clarify information given. Additionally, there is need for the corroboration of evidence gathered from other sources such as observations and documentary evidence to validate students' views.

The thematic analysis revealed behaviours which were suggestive of the complex nature of disengagement. However, in light of the scale of the project it was not

possible to construct a typology of disengagement. Hence, as a research path, it would be desirable to increase the sample size and incorporate more schools from different communities in order to capture the varieties in forms of disengagement in schools. This would serve as a basis for constructing a typology that would identify nuances of disengagement, thereby elucidating the multi dimensional nature of this process.

The research findings also suggested the influence of other non-school interests in the lives of the girls. However, this research did not considered the broader social factors and other influences that students draw upon to make sense of their schooling experiences as part of the wider construction of their self identity. Consequently, another research pursuit would be to explore the impact of sociocultural influences on students' disengagement choices. This would necessitate a consideration of the views of other significant persons in their life, such as friends, parents, and teachers, to gain a more complete insight into their schooling experiences and disengagement tendencies.

In view of the concerns raised over the conduct of educational ethnographies, future research should consider the pursuant of ethnographic work in schools that are located in a geographic region like the Caribbean, where there might be relatively fewer issues with gaining research approval and negotiating access to schools. I believe that such research is overdue in view of the fact that there

appears to be no known published research on disengagement in Caribbean schools.

6.5 Conclusion

This study has explored the schooling experiences of a small sample of girls aged 15-16 years judged by their teacher to be disengaged. The literature review and findings attested to the complex nature of disengagement. Given the scale of the study, it was not possible to identify a distinct typology of forms of disengagement and further study is warranted to elucidate the extent of disengagement. Hence, consideration should be given to the conduct of further explorative research to unravel the complexity of disengagement. Further, as a research alternative, consideration should be given to the conduct of ethnographic pilot research in the Caribbean region to shed light on the issue of disengagement.

The use of semi-structured interviews was successful in obtaining rich insights into the lived experiences of the girls. Hence, the research findings support the use of semi-structured interviews and narrative-based thematic analysis as a platform for future ethnographic research within an interactionist tradition. However, consideration needs to be given to the use of triangulated methods to increase the validity of research findings and to provide richer research insights. There is also the need to examine individual agency against the backdrop of other social, economic and structural factors as a further research initiative.

REFERENCES

- Archer, L., Halsall, A. and Hollingworth, S. (2007) Class, Gender, (Hetero) sexuality and Schooling: Paradoxes Within Working-class Girls' Engagement with Education and Post-16 Aspirations, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol 28, no. 2, pp. 165 - 180.
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Razavieh, A. and Sorensen, C. (2006) *Introduction to research in education*, Belmont, CA, Thomson/Wadsworth.
- Balfanz, R., Herzog, L. and Mac Iver, D. J. (2007) Preventing student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle-grades schools: Early identification and effective interventions, *Educational Psychologist*, vol 42, no. 4, pp. 223-235.
- Ball, S. J. (2003) 'Self doubt and Soft data: social and technical trajectories in ethnographic research' in Hammersley, M. (ed.) *Educational Research: Current Issues*, London, Sage/ Open University Press.
- BERA (2004) *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, available online at: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/pdfs/ETHICA1.PDF> (accessed 21 January, 2008).
- Black, R. (2006) *Overcoming Disadvantage through the Engaging Classroom*, Melbourne, Australia, The R. E. Ross Trust/ Education Foundation.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol 3, no. 2, pp. 77 - 101.
- Broadhurst, K., Paton, H. and May-Chahal, C. (2005) 'Children missing from school systems: exploring divergent patterns of disengagement in the narrative accounts of parents, carers, children and young people', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol 26, no. 1, pp. 105 - 119.
- Brown, P. (1987) *Schooling Ordinary Kids: Inequality, Unemployment, and the New Vocationalism*, London, Tavistock.
- Bukowski, W. M., Newcomb, A. F. and Hartup, W. W. (1996) *The Company They Keep: Friendship in Childhood and Adolescence*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Code of Practice for Research and Those Conducting Research available online at: <http://www.open.ac.uk/research> (accessed 21 January, 2008).
- Coleman, J. S. (1985) *Becoming Adult in a Changing Society*, Paris, OECD.

Collins, J. (1996) *The Quiet Child*, London, Cassell.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) *14-19 Education and Skills: 14-16 Re-engagement Programme* available online at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?sid=40andpid326andlid=292andctype=Textandpt> (accessed 9 October, 2007).

Dwyer, P. and Wynn, J. (2001) *Youth, Education and Risk: Facing the Future*, London, Routledge.

Finn, J. D. and Rock, D. A. (1997) 'Academic success among students at risk for school failure', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol 82, no. 2, pp. 221 - 234.

Fredricks, J. A., Blumefeld, P. C. and Paris, A. H. (2004) 'School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence', *Review of Educational Research*, vol 74, no. 1, pp. 59-109.

Gaskell, G. (2000) 'Individual and Group Interviewing' in Bauer, M. W. and Gaskell, G. (eds.) *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*, London, Sage.

Hammersley, M. (ed.) (1999) *Researching School Experience: Ethnographic Studies of Teaching and Learning*, London, Falmer Press.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (2007) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, London, Routledge.

Hammersley, M. and Gomm, R. (2005) 'Recent radical criticism of the interview in qualitative inquiry' in Holborn, M. and Haralambos, M. (eds.) *Developments in Sociology*, Edinburg, Pearson Education.

Kendall, S. and Kinder, K. (2005) *Reclaiming Those Disengaged from Education and Learning: a European Perspective* Slough, NFER.

Kvale, S. (1996) *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, London, Sage.

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Lessard, A., Butler-Kisber, L., Fortin, L., Marcotte, D., Potvin, P. and Royer, E. (2008) 'Shades of disengagement: High school dropouts speak out', *Social Psychology of Education*, vol 11, no. 1, pp. 25 - 42.

Libbey, H. P. (2004) 'Measuring student relationships to school: Attachment, Bonding, Connectedness, and Engagement', *Journal of School Health*, vol 74, no. 7, pp. 274-283.

Marks, H. M. (2000) 'Student engagement in instructional activity: patterns in the elementary, middle, and high school years', *American Educational Research Journal*, vol 37, no. 1, pp. 153-184.

McIntosh, S. and Houghton, N. (2005) *Disengagement from Secondary Education: A story Retold*, London, Learning and Skills Development Agency.

McMillan, G. (2003) 'Is no child left behind in wise schooling for African American male students?', *The High School Journal*, vol 87, no.2, pp. 25 -33.

Pollard, A. (2007) 'The Identity and Learning Programme: 'principled pragmatism' in a 12-year longitudinal ethnography', *Ethnography and Education*, vol 2, no.1, pp. 1 - 19.

Pollard, A. and Filer, A. (1999) 'Learning, policy and pupil careers: Issues from a longitudinal ethnography', in Hammersley, M. (ed.) *Researching School Experience: Ethnographic Studies of Teaching and Learning*, London, Falmer Press.

Pollard, A. and Filer, A. (2005). *Learning Differentiation and Strategic Action in Secondary Education: Analyses from the Identity and Learning Programme*, TLPP Annual Conference, Warwick, TLRP.

Rathbone/Nuffield 14-19 Review (2007) 'Engaging Youth Enquiry', Manchester, Rathbone available online at: [http://www.rathboneuk.org/press_release.aspx? ID=184](http://www.rathboneuk.org/press_release.aspx?ID=184) (accessed 9 October 2007).

Rudduck, J. and Flutter, J. (2000) 'Pupil participation and pupil perspective: 'carving a new order of experience' *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol 30, no.1, pp. 75-89.

Seale, C. (1998) 'Qualitative interviewing' in Seale, C. (ed.) *Researching Society and Culture*, London, Sage.

Smyth, J. (2006) 'When students have power: student engagement, student voice, and the possibilities for school reform around 'dropping out' of school', *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, vol 9, no.4, pp. 285 - 298.

Steedman, H. and Stoney, S. (2004) 'Disengagement 14-16: Context and Evidence', London, CEP available online at: [http://cep.lse.ac.uk/_new/publications/year.asp? pubyear=2004](http://cep.lse.ac.uk/_new/publications/year.asp?pubyear=2004) (accessed 9 October 2007).

Steinberg, L. (1996) *Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform Has Changed and What Parents Need To Do*, New York; Simon and Schuster.

Taylor, S. (2006) *Ethnographic Research: A Reader*, London: Sage/Open University Press

Williams, R. and Pritchard, C. (2006) *Breaking the Cycle of Educational Alienation: A Multi-professional Approach*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.

WORD COUNT: 16349

Appendix 1

Dimensions of Disengagement

Identifying behavioural disengagement: non-participation in academic and non academic activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- defiance of rules- skipping school- not obeying classroom rules- lack of effort or expending low effort (simply not doing the work)- lack of persistence, concentration, attention- not asking questions, not contribution to class discussion- non-participation in school-related or extra-curricular activities such as athletics or school council
Identifying emotional disengagement: affective reactions in the classroom to the school and the teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- lacking a sense of belonging or a feeling of being important to the school- lacking a sense of attainment value non-appreciation of success, that is, doing well on the task- negative feelings towards the school: – disliking the school, the teacher or the work- feeling sad in the school- being bored or uninterested in the work
Identifying cognitive disengagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Lack of self regulation- Not being strategic- No preference for hard work- Little or no effort directed at learning, understanding or mastering knowledge- Not valuing learning- Non use of learning strategies to remember, organise and understand the material- Inability to suppress distractions- Lack of intrinsic motivation- Not trying to understand something that is challenging

Evidence of different dimensions of disengagement based on the work of Fredricks et al. (2004)

Appendix 2

Interview Schedules

Teachers' interview schedule

Introduction: Welcome informant

Reminder of ethical standards to be followed (confidentiality, data protection, withdrawal rights, use of information, etc)

List of possible questions/ issues to be raised

1 Name, role in school, professional history e.g.:

How long have you been teaching at the school?

Tell me about your professional history and your role in this school

2 Description of the school, catchment area and intake e.g.:

Can you tell me a little about the school and its catchment area as well as the student intake?

3 Description of students that are taught e.g.:

How many of the Year 11 students do you teach? How are they organised? Which group do you find easiest to teach? Which group is opposite to this group? Can you tell me about the girls in these two contrasting groups?

Teachers are given a paper to write down the class list as they talk about the girls in each group. Descriptions should be about anything that they find significant about the girls, that is worth mentioning: this can include attitude, behaviour, performance, achievement, successes, personalities, appearance, family background, ability, aptitude (prompts given to draw out descriptions, or talk about students not mentioned (I have copies of the class list for the particular subjects)

4 Questions from informant

Do you have any questions for me or are there anything I should have asked and have not?

Conclusion: Pause to allow informant to make any additional comments

Thank informant

Students' interview schedule

Introduction: Welcome informant

Brief reminder of ethical standards to be followed (confidentiality, data protection, withdrawal rights, use of data, etc)

List of possible questions/ issues to be raised

- 1 How would you describe yourself to somebody? - (a friend or perhaps someone in a chat room).
- 2 How long have you been at this school and why did you choose to come to this school rather than another one?
- 3 Tell me about your feelings towards school. What does coming to school mean to you? Tell me about your experiences of school.
- 4 Tell me about your lessons. How do you find your lessons generally? How do you feel about the way you are learning in your lessons? Tell about a lesson that you enjoy. Tell me what you do during a normal lesson? How do you prepare for your lessons at home?

- 5 Tell me about other things that you enjoy doing besides coming to school. Do you take part in after school or other extra-curricular activities? How do you spend your afternoons/evenings after school?
- 6 What do you want to do after you leave school? Do you think that school prepares you for your future career?
- 7 Is there any one you see as a source of motivation in your life? As a young person, is there a certain way of life that you would like to be living? Tell me about your social life.
- 8 Questions from informant

Is there anything that you would like to ask me or that you want to add?

Conclusion: Pause to allow informant to make any additional comments

Thank informant

Appendix 3

Excerpts from Transcribed Interviews

Excerpts from teachers' interview

In these excerpts the teachers talk about the school, its catchment area and its intake. **Researcher's questions are in bold font.**

Science Teacher: Mr. Pritchard

- Do you want me to say something about the nature of the school?

Sure. Especially if you can contrast the time you came in with the nature of the school now

- Sure (laughs) When I came here it was like Beirut; it really was very, very rough and I was the first person appointed by the head teacher then, in 1995. And, he took the school through a very, very quick change. He really hit the ground: one, he was very visible and he introduced a lot more structure to the school and a lot stricter discipline so that by the time 1998,

1999 came around, the school was a completely different place and as a result it changed its name fromto

So what can you say about the kinds of students who come to this school now and how would you contrast them with the nature of those who came before when you entered?

- Well to be honest the nature of the pupils has not changed that much in the 13 years I've been here. We are sited on a fairly middle class housing estate and we get very few people from the housing estate. We might a handful each year, in each cohort. The rest of our cohort tends to be bussed in from oror area.

So is the catchment a middle class area?

- I would, em, parts of it are, parts of it aren't and parts.... I would say if you look at our free school meals ratio, it would suggest that we tend to have quite a significant proportion of em deprived households here as well. And err; we tend to have the complete batch. We have very, very able kids and em, we also have kids who have quite significant special needs, quite a lot going on at home to be honest em you just have to look around the school and see some of the kids who come in late. I don' t want to mention names, but there are a lot of lads and girls you can see who have a lot going on outside school. I can remember four years ago I had a lad in my form who seems very down in the dumps, I say come on what's up with

you, are you feeling okay today.....had a call for burglary at night and I say ah, he had broke into a house.....We have several pupils like those, who have, I get the impression that they have free reign when they get home basically.

RE Teacher: Mrs. Baird

So how would you describe the catchment area?

- The catchment of the school is, and area so even though the school is situated in quite an affluent area the majority, almost three quarters do not come from the surrounding area of the school, they come from the outskirts of the town ,we do have a lot of pupils from socially deprived areas

How would you compare these groups of students to those who were there when you came in?

- The students are more or less the same because as the years have gone on the housing estate around the school where we did have youngsters coming in they are the new young generation the families have moved out. Apparently before I came here we used to have pupils bussed in as far as MD....., L....., not MD.....,L, M So the area was much bigger we used to have three or four double-decker buses so the children when I came in , now we've got three single-decker buses and they're not even

full to capacity so it has been a big change over the years and the type of child that come to the school

Year 11 Form Tutor: Mr. Douglas

How would you describe this school and its catchment area? Can you compare it to the school you taught at previously?

- This school is in direct contrast to the school where I taught at previously: A five star A-C GCSE figure of 78% whereas here is 30%. Quite a big difference in terms of performance; In terms of catchment area, there is a fairly high proportion of rented housing, council housing. In my previous school it was more private housing in a middle class area. The aspirations are different as well a lot of the pupils here have got very low aspirations and expectations. In previous school quite a lot of single parent families in this school I am not sure what the population is for e.g. in the Year 11 engineering class the only two trouble makers in the class are from single parent families.

Excerpts from students' interview

In these excerpts the students talk about interests that are particularly important to them.

Researcher's questions are in bold font.

Annette: Socialising

What do you think of your lessons?

- A lot of the teachers were really, really good and I don't know it's like it's not just a place for learning it's also a place where you get to meet friends. My friends are very important to me and if I had no friends it would be horrible

When do you get to see your friends?

- Some of them are in my lessons, some of them aren't. I have many friends but I have closer friends like I've got a lot of male friends out of school because I find it easier to get on with them a lot of the times because most of the time with lads you do not get the bitchiness you get with girls

What do your friends think of school?

- Most of the friends I lime with they can't see the point cause one of me friends have already got a job. One of them I lime with works at _____ and wants to be a hairdresser; so she can't really see the point in her being here cause if she wasn't here she would have been working

Is there any thing apart from going to lessons that you do or any other activities that you do out of school?

- I see my friends most days

How often do you go out?

- Two or three times during the week then Friday and Saturday Friday nights and Saturday nights I go out with my friends

How important is socialising to you?

- It's really important to me. I've got a lot of friends who are a lot older than me so I find that I learn a lot of things from being out with my friends. Although you learn different thing about maths, science or English on your own but when you are with your friends you learn stuff about life

Elsa: Work

If you do not perform well at school will your mum help you in any way?

- Oh yeah but I've had a job for about six months now so well I haven't got it any more I used to have it about two weeks ago

Was it a care job?

- No Kitchen Assistant

How did you get it?

- I rang up I rang up well I thought it was my last year so I justit was not a big job but it was better than nothing I've always preferred to work better than school I know

Did you save the money?

- God no, I haven't got any I left the job two weeks ago but I've got 72 quid in my bank It takes ten days for you to get paid and can't wait to get the money in my bank. I had 300 quid and it was all gone in two weeks

Will you go to college straight away after you leave school?

- Em, I've always wanted to get a job first because if I'm not if I don't like school then I don't think I'd really like college I just don't think that learning is my thing you know what I mean yeah so I've always like working I've loved it up there with the old people so

- I like work better than school I love my money mum is going mad I spent £300 in two week. Mum doesn't give me pocket money because I've got a job

You said that you left it two weeks ago?

- Yes but I've got one when I'm sixteen I had one lined up for when I'm sixteen in August I have to do a trial week in august and then start my mum always wanted me to do things on my own. My friend's twenty and she got fed up of the dole it is claiming other people's money; 'if you get your own things and be more independent it is better for example if you want a phone you can go to buy it and not have to wait until Christmas or so'.

What is the upcoming job about?

- Care work; it's in an old people's home

Phyllis: Sports

How would you describe yourself to someone?

- I'd say that I've got a lot of hobbies, I like doing sports em I like talking to people I like making friends. I like doing a lot of things I am an outgoing person I do athletics as well, running I do marathon runs.

What do you do on an afternoon after school when you go home?

- Em I go football training and basically see my friends after school. I go for training twice in the week and I play at the weekend again- Saturday. I go with friends on a Friday. I don't always go out every night. I like staying in some nights and making me dad some tea. Dad has no problem he likes me going out a couple nights a week and encourages me to do it. I have a good relationship with my dad.

What do you want to do when you leave school?

- I want to go to college to do Sport Science and I want to train to be a Health and Fitness Trainer and a Dietician.

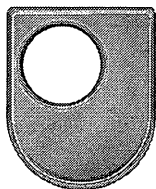
Who do you see as a source of motivation?

- Well my dad motivates me a lot to do things like football it has kept me from associating with the wrong people and going out and drinking, the night before a game I stay in and eat the right foods. I do not drink or

smoke. I can't smoke. Now and again I will have a drink or something but I am quite sensible when it comes to things like that cause its football and it's quite serious what I am doing. For football you get drugs test. I'm playing in the FA quite an important league. I've just recently had my first game in the women's team as a reserve. Someone comes to the football game and gives you all the drug test they don't tell you they're coming they just come out of the blue like that

What do you think of that?

- Well you shouldn't take drugs it's against the law and if you've had any drugs then you'll get caught eventually



The Open University

**Faculty of Education and
Language Studies**

The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA
United Kingdom

Tel +44 (0) 1908 274 066
www.open.ac.uk

_____ 2008

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am Mrs. Uthel Laurent, a research student at the Open University, whose previous career was as a teacher in the local area. I am presently conducting an investigation into the learning experiences of students. Your child has been selected to participate in this project. Please find enclosed an information booklet which will detail the purpose and nature of the research as well as explaining how the information collected about your child will be used and handled.

Please indicate whether you are prepared to allow your child to participate in the project by signing in the consent form provided. Forms should be returned to the school's main office at the end of the week. Unless the form is returned, your child will not be able to participate in the project.

Should you have any further queries about the project do not hesitate to contact me using the contact details outlined in the information booklet provided.

Thank you for your anticipated support in this project.

Yours sincerely

Uthel Laurent
Research Student

Child and Youth Studies Group
Tel +44 (0) 1908 332 425
u.laurent@open.ac.uk

Uthel Laurent

CONSENT FORM

I (**Name of student**) agree to take part in the research project. I have had the purpose of the research explained to me. I have been informed that I may refuse to participate by simply saying so or by filling in a withdrawal form which should be handed at the main office in a sealed envelope. I have been assured that my confidentiality will be protected as explained in the booklet and letter. The researcher has explained to me about data protection. I agree that the information that I provide can be used for educational or research purposes including publication. I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact (**Name of Researcher**) at (**Mobile or E mail**). If I want to talk to someone else about the project, I can contact the researcher's supervisor (**Name of Supervisor**) at (**Telephone or E mail**).

.....

I..... (**Name of Parent/Guardian**) agree to allow my daughter to take part in the research project. I have been given information about the aim and purpose of the research. I have been informed that my daughter may refuse to participate by simply saying so or by completing a withdrawal form which should be handed in at the main office in a sealed envelope. I have been assured that my daughter's confidentiality will be protected as well as how information collected will be used and protected as explained and specified in the booklet and letter. I agree that information that my daughter provides can be used for educational or research purposes including publication. I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact (**Name of Researcher**) at (**Mobile or E mail**). If I want to talk to someone else about the project, I can contact the researcher's supervisor (**Name of Supervisor**) at (**Telephone or E mail**).

School's Approval

1ST February 2008

Dear Uthel

Many thanks for your kind letter and I am glad to hear that things are going well and to read about your studies.

I would be delighted to offer you the opportunity to undertake your research at _____ and look forward to working alongside you again.

I trust that your family is well and that you will be in touch with me soon to make arrangements for your research.

Yours

HEADTEACHER

Ethics Committee's Approval



MEMORANDUM

HUMAN PARTICIPANTS AND MATERIALS ETHICS COMMITTEE

FROM: John Oates, Chair, HPMEC **Email:** j.m.oates@open.ac.uk
To: Uthel Laurent (MRes student) PLAC **TEL:** 52395
CC: **DATE:** 6 March 2008
SUBJECT: **Ethics application:** Exploring Educational Engagement: How do the cultural practices that girls engage in help in understanding their educational engagement and achievement? **Ref:** HPMEC/08/#398/1

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted on 28th February 2008, is approved by the Open University Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee, subject to satisfactory responses to the following:

You are asked to:

1. Remove/replace the image on the front of the information leaflet. It is considered by the scrutiny panel to be an inappropriate representation for your study
2. Consider whether potential participants should be given information about how they have been selected for approach and justify your decision, giving a good case for withholding this information if that is what you decide

At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

John Oates
Chair, OU HPMEC

From: J.M.Oates
Sent: 13 March 2008 10:41
To: U.Laurent
Subject: RE: Ethics application #398

Dear Uthel Laurent,

Thank you for these revised documents.
I have reviewed them and can confirm that they satisfactorily address the recommendations of the scrutiny panel.
This completes the ethics approval for your project.

I hope that the research goes well.

John Oates
Chair, HPMEC

-----Original Message-----

From: U.Laurent [mailto:U.Laurent@open.ac.uk]
Sent: 10 March 2008 16:41
To: J.M.Oates
Subject: RE: Ethics application #398

Dear Mr. Oates,

Thank you for your email acknowledging tentative ethical approval of my research. Please find attached the relevant documents which have been reviewed and amended to reflect the recommendations given as follows:

- a) The image at front of booklet has been excluded
- b) The ethic form has been amended under the sub headings of Recruitment procedures and Deception

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Uthel Laurent

Appendix 6

Case Narratives of Students

Annette's Story

Annette describes herself as a 16 year old who is 'quite outgoing', 'quite an honest person', 'quite loud', 'someone who does not take life so seriously and who tries to be open and have fun'. Annette spent five years at this school. Her main reason for coming to school is because 'that is where all my friends from primary school went and because it was the closest school for me'.

Annette reports that 'her family mean every thing to her'. She lives alone with her mum. Annette reports that her mum gives her a lot of freedom. She feels that if she shows her mum that respect her mum will show her back respect and let her do things. Her view is that 'if I am honest with her she can trust me to do things'. Annette recounts that it took her a long time to build this level of trust with her mum and that 'it was not an overnight thing'. Since it is only the two of them in the house, things could 'get heated up' and 'out of hand'. Annette reports that 'it is only as I have gotten older, me and me mum have started getting on'. Annette reported that she has resorted to telling her mum the truth which is easier than to 'run into' her because 'my mum is "a psychic", she knows everything by just looking at you'.

From the interview response it appears that Annette's life gravitates around her friends. Annette stress that her friends are 'very important' to her and like her family they mean everything to her. She has found it easy to make friends and try to be open and have fun because 'it makes it easier'. She is of the view that 'school is not just a place for learning but also a place to get to meet friends and it is important for your social skills to learn how to deal with other people: 'if you don't know how to deal you will not be successful at your job'. She reports that 'if I had no friends it would be "horrible" and things would have been completely different'. Annette recalls that she has many friends. Some of her friends are in her lessons but she has closer male friends that are out of school. A lot of the time she finds it easier to get on with the lads since 'you don't get the bitchiness you get with girls'. Annette reports that she has gotten a lot of friends older than her and she learns 'a lot of things' from being out with her friends: 'when you are with your friends you learn stuff about life'. Annette sees her friends most days. She goes out two or three times during the week and on Friday and Saturday nights.

Annette is in the top set for most of her lessons. She reports that 'a lot of the teaching is really, really good'. Some days they cover loads in lesson and other days they don't 'because other people in the top set are talking'. Annette reports that she likes exciting lessons with a whole range of activities and chooses subjects that interest her even if her teachers want her to do otherwise. Annette reports that she finds RE, English, English Literature and Psychology interesting.

She wanted to be a lawyer 'years and years ago' but now she does not know what she wants to do. She is now thinking of 'doing something to do with Psychology or Law in university'.

Annette reports that if the lesson is not interesting she would 'just have sat there'. However she gives an account of her maths experience for two and a half years with substitute teachers, which she claims has affected her school performance and caused her to get a D on a Foundation paper. Annette reports that she doesn't really get to do a lot at home and she does not get to do her home work.

Mr. Pritchard sees Annette as an 'unorganised' student. He reports that 'she can be quite upset sometimes in lessons about things that are going on and she can sometimes not really be with you in the class'. He also states that she and Rachel tend to circulate in peer groups known to engage in negative behaviours. According to Mr. Pritchard, Annette is a very able young lady who 'could walk through' her exams and who should be able to get a grade B without any problems. He cites certain issues affecting her performance such as lack of revision and the poor standard of her course work. Mr. Pritchard is of the view that although Annette 'gets extra scaffolding in lessons' to help her she 'cannot engage'; however, she is beginning to 'turn things around'

Mrs. Baird is of the view that Annette is 'a very good ability girl' but 'she is one of these girls you know that has her own agenda and she is quite difficult to keep

motivated always'. Mrs. Baird reports that although Annette is targeted for an A she got a grade C in the mock exam. Mrs. Baird ascribed her underperformance to health problems, having to go to catch up lessons in Science, Maths and English and not putting in the work in her revision.

Annette reports that half way through Year Ten she has grown up a lot. She is of the view that 'looking back, I could have tried harder and should have taken some things more seriously'. As exams are coming up she revises with her friend. She remarks that 'I want to do well I want to go to university, I want to have enough money to afford things'. Annette stresses that no one in her family, not even her mum has gone to university and that 'I would like to do it for myself so that I can say that I tried'.

Annette reports that her experience of school has been fun 'despite its ups and downs'. She ascribes this fun to 'people' at school including both staff and students. Nevertheless, she reports that she has never got on with her Head of Year who served in that capacity for five years. Annette notes that 'different people get different things out of school depending on what they want to do in life'. She also reports that most of the friends she limes with can't see the point in school. She provides an account of a friend who wants to be a hairdresser and 'can't really see the point in being at school'. Annette reports that 'some things in school like taking off your coat in a building are very petty: it's like the end of the

world; it is doing no body any harm'. Her view is that 'I will miss school when I'm gone' and that 'everyone I know will miss the school'.

Elsa's Story

Elsa is the younger of two siblings living with her parents. She attends the secondary school which is 'down the road from her home' and like her brother she has been there for five years. Elsa appears to have a negative view of herself. She describes herself as 'dozy, loud, annoying, stubborn, bad, naughty and horrible'. When prompted she included the qualities of 'friendly, polite and "classic"'. Mr. Pritchard reported that he liked Elsa. He describes her as a very 'naïve' student who 'comes out with some crazy things'.

Evidence suggests that Elsa cares about her family. Elsa reports she and her mum are exactly the same in that they never really liked school. She explains that her brother 'was really, really quiet and had never even had a break detention'. Hence 'it [her behaviour] was a massive shock because [her mum] thought she would turn out like her brother'. Elsa also reflects on the effect of her behaviour at school on her family. She reports that 'falling into the wrong crowd' and 'getting letters home' was stressing her mum and causing a lot of upset with her mum and dad. She laments over the fact that her 'little cousin is going through the same thing' as she went once did. She also makes reference to her family when

she reports that she wanted to make her mum and dad proud even if she doubts that she has done so. Nevertheless she still 'feels 'deep within' that they love her. Elsa also documents the values that her mum instils in her, that of being independent and saving her money. She reports that her mum was 'going mad' when she spent £300 in two weeks.

Elsa appears to recognise the importance of school. Accordingly, she reports that she 'cannot do without school' and that she sees the need to work during lessons because 'there are people who do not even get a chance to come to school'. She sees school as one of the means of securing a job and pursuing a career. She also reports that she thinks 'school helps' even though she is 'not into it'. Elsa appears to acknowledge school rules regarding attendance and punctuality. She reports that although she has thought about skiving once she wouldn't dare. However, there appears to be some contradiction in Elsa's report. Mr Pritchard acknowledges that Elsa always turns up late for science lessons. Elsa later recounts that she is on a dinner and break report for 'going only down the road' at dinner. She does give not any evidence of how many times she has been on this truancy report before.

Elsa repeatedly acknowledges her lack of commitment to school. She voiced her dislike of school when she states that 'I've never really been very keen into school' 'I am not into school'; I've never been into academics and I've never really wanted to come to school'. Elsa says that she has felt this way from the time she

was in 'little school'. Mr. Pritchard recognises Elsa negative attitude to school. In his account he reasoned that 'school is where she comes before she goes home' and that 'the next real part of it is when she gets home'

It appears from her report that Elsa does not enjoy many lessons. Elsa reports that gets bored easily at school. She expresses the view that she does not take part in any other extra-curricular activities. Although her favourite subject is Art, Elsa provides reasons for not wanting to continuing to study it. She feels that 'there is nothing really going with Art'; 'to do Arts I would have to go far away like London' and that "it is really hard to get into a good school'. In the end she reasons that 'for someone who doesn't really like school and isn't really keen about college I would prefer to work first'.

Elsa believes that some subjects are 'a waste of time' and there is no point in doing certain of them since she would 'never use them. Most times she just sits in lessons and tries to work. She acknowledges that she is the one 'not really putting her mind to it'. If a lesson is uninteresting she would 'sit and daydream'. At the end of the school day she looks forward to 'going home and going out after'. Elsa does not do any home work. She states emphatically that 'school is school and home is home'. She strongly points out that she has never really done homework because she has 'never seen the point in doing homework'.

Mr. Pritchard's and Mrs. Baird's accounts show that Elsa does not appear to esteem her lessons highly. Mr. Pritchard gave account of Elsa's lack of preparation for lessons and her poor performance in Science and Maths Module test. He reports that Elsa 'is a concern' because although 'she will try to engage a bit, she does no revision and is very reluctant to produce much work in lessons'. Mrs. Baird also provides a negative view of Elsa's attitude to learning. Her account of Elsa is that she is 'a bright girl but downright lazy and basically tries to disrupt the class by shouting out all the time'. She also reports that Elsa is 'mouth almighty' and 'very immature'.

School does not appear to be a priority in Elsa's life. It appears that other areas of interest such as her job and social life are more important than school. Elsa clearly states that 'I've always preferred to work better than school'. She reports that she want a job first [before going to college] because 'if I don't like school I don't think that I would like college as learning is not my thing'. Elsa gives account of the job as Kitchen Assistant that she held for approximately six months which she saw as 'not a big job but better than nothing'. She took the initiative in securing the job by ringing up. She has also secured another job in 'an old people home' after she completes her secondary education in August. The jobs that Elsa has found require little or no educational qualification but they 'allow her to have things now instead of waiting for Christmas'. A job enables Elsa to doing things on her own and prevents her from 'claiming other people's

money'. She recounts that 'if you get your own things and be more independent it is better'.

Elsa report points to two different groups that she associates with. She explained that she goes out with girls in Year Eleven. She also reports that she and her mates are all not deed keen to work at school and that her mates are all fed up of school because they've 'got to go'. In addition, she thinks that sometimes her mates either do not come in, or go out of school and not come back, because that's their way of showing that they 'can't be bothered' about school.

In terms of her social life out of school, Elsa relies to a great extent on girls who have already left school who she sees as 'a lot more mature'. Socialising is important for Elsa since she gets 'bored dead easy' in the house. Socialising takes the form of going out and spending time at her mates' house. Elsa expresses her disgust at teenagers who sit on the street. She describes this situation as 'horrible and the worse thing ever' which does not look right'. She reports that instead, she and her mates 'just go to have a drink ' or if they are having a lot of drinks they 'go round to some one's house'. Elsa reports that if the group are not doing anything they will 'pop down' to the pub. Elsa provides some inconsistencies in her account of her socialising days. During the early part of the interview she reports that 'Friday night is her night out' and she goes to the pub 'on a Sunday not Friday'. Later she declares that 'I go out any day really' and that

her curfew is approximately 10: 30 p.m. However, Elsa does not say whether her curfew applies to both weekdays and weekends.

Elsa feels that group influence has contributed to her poor performance and negative view of school. She feels that she has made a change in her behaviour. She reports that in Year Seven she used to be 'really, really good and had her head down' to doing her work. Even though she 'never really liked school' she 'tried to like it in Year Seven'. She documents that things took a turn for the worse from Year Eight when she became part of the 'wrong crowd' which she described as 'troublemakers'. She recounts that 'I started "faffing about", following people I shouldn't hang around with'. In particular she reports that in Year Eight she decided not to work because 'I didn't like it': 'I fell back and didn't even put me head down'. Hence, in Year Eight, Nine and Ten she felt that she was 'bad'. Elsa reports that as she is in Year 11 she is 'maturing now' as she is no longer in the wrong crowd. This view however contrasts with that of Mr. Pritchard who reports that Elsa 'hangs around with the less desirable elements'. Elsa recognizes that the learning mentor helped her to make the change. This has resulted in 'just the odd letter' being sent home. She reports that in Year 11 she doesn't see the learning mentor again because 'I have gotten better in school'. In her account Elsa identifies the learning mentor's job as one she would like to pursue and feels that the learning mentor is a motivator for her at school since 'all I ever get off the other teachers is how good you were when you were in Year Seven. Elsa also

recounts that 'I'm not proud of what I was doing' and 'would tell others to avoid falling into the wrong crowd'.

Marlene's Story

Marlene describes herself as a 'miserable' person who 'can be a laugh'. Mr. Pritchard describes Marlene as a 'strange little girl' who sometimes gives the impression that she is in an act. He expressed the view that Marlene acts as if she is on the terrace of a football match, talks to you as if she is on the street and 'uses "those types of phrases" so readily, out of context and in an offhand casual manner'. Mr Pritchard reports that he wonders if she understands the social rules on how and where people talk in a conversation and he wonders very much about what she's experienced in the last five years.

Marlene started this school in Year Ten and has been at this school for two years. She reported that she moved to this school because she had family problems and was 'kicked out' of her dad's house. Marlene reports that she used to live with her mum but she has not seen her 'for three years now'. Her mum lives in a hostel and she does not see her mum because 'she did some bad things to her'.

Marlene does not presently live within the school's catchment area of the school. She lives a good distance away from the school about '20 minutes by buses. She lives with her boyfriend who picks her up from school most afternoons. Mrs. Baird reported that Marlene moved out of the area for a short time and since she lived with her boyfriend she stopped coming to school. Accordingly, Mrs. Baird reports that the boyfriend was charged with court action because Marlene 'is a minor living with him [and] he's got responsibility for sending her to school'.

Marlene reports that she 'is a family person'. She keeps in close contact with her Nan (her father's mother) and loves to go shopping with her. Even when she goes out with her friends she stops over by her Nan. Marlene reports that she does not really go out now because she has gotten her own house. She enjoys cleaning and cooking and keeping the house together even if it sometimes 'gets on her nerves'. On Sundays she stays in and does some work around the house and also cooks some dinner. Marlene recounts that 'I really love to cook; my Nan told me that I can be a good cook or chef because I can cook anything'.

Marlene's home commitment appears to have an effect on her school work. She reports that her ability to work during lessons depends on what mood she is in. Marlene report that she can sometimes 'get stressed about things at home' and this cause her to 'switch off' and not learn and she won't work. When she is in that mood she does not answer questions and this affects her performance.

Marlene reports that she does some homework at night time when her boyfriend goes to work.

Marlene looks at her timetable in the morning and decides whether she will enjoy the school day or not. Her key concern in school is about the teaching. She suggests that a good reason why some people might skive is because 'they do not like the teachers'. Marlene reports that when she first came to school there were rumours about some teachers. She remarks that 'they do not take time to teach people here'. In most lessons she gets bored because of the way the lessons are taught. . She enjoys subjects that 'allow you to learn from it' like the English lessons which uses humour, or subjects that is 'practical' and 'allows you to probably take in what the teacher is saying or do more stuff and see what you are doing'. During the interview, Marlene gives an account of the way English and History are taught at this school and compares the History lessons with the ones at her old school.

Marlene reports that she has applied to do Hair and Beauty at a college because it is a practical course. However, although Graphics is a practical subject Marlene reports that the teacher can make it difficult. She recounts that the teacher 'takes half an hour to come to you if you are stuck and need help; and shouts at you because you have done no work but it her fault because she hasn't come to you'.

Marlene reports that 'school is alright'. She looks forward to coming to school everyday to see her mates. She reports that her friends help her to understand the work. However, Marlene's home situation leaves her little time for socialising outside of school with her friends. When she can she goes out with her mates on a Friday night. She doesn't really go out now and hasn't seen her mates for a while now. Marlene likes going out with her mates and she reports that she misses her friends.

Marlene reports that she prefers this school because of the school policy: 'they exclude you when you fight instead of making you write lines'. Marlene suggests that 'school is good but it depends on the attitude you give when you walk through the doors'. She reports that her attitude has changed from Year Ten: 'I used to get E's and D's and now I am getting A's and B's in my course work and everything; so I think that I've done good'.

Phyllis' Story

Phyllis has been at this school for two years having come from a school which was half an hour's drive away by car. She moved to this school as she moved in with her dad who lives in the school catchment area. Phyllis prefers this school since it is 'smaller' and because 'you get more help like after school lessons and revision lessons'.

Phyllis says that she is an 'outgoing person' who likes talking to people and making friends. She reports that she has a lot of hobbies: she likes sports, playing football, athletics and marathon runs. She plays football for a women's team.

Phyllis makes reference to her family during the interview. She lives with her dad and her sister while her brothers live with her mum. Phyllis reports that she gets lonely at home. Her sister 'is sort of out all the time'. Her sister 'works out and is not in a lot because she is eighteen'. Her dad works late but comes in about half five or so sometimes. He 'goes to bed early to go to work early so that he can get the week end off'. Phyllis reports that she has a good relationship with her dad. He motivates her to do a lot of things like football and keeps her from associating with the wrong crowd, from drinking the night before a game and eating the right foods. Her dad likes her 'going out a couple nights a week and encourages [her] to do it'. However, she likes to stay in some nights and make her dad some tea. Phyllis reports that she does not want to fall out with her dad.

Throughout the interview Phyllis consistently stated that 'I do not like' and 'I never liked' school. She did not like her 'old school' or her primary school either. She reports that 'I just don't like it since I was little. I've always wanted to grow up; I'd like to be an adult'. She is of the view that she wouldn't be who she was because of going to school. She reports that some of her friends 'don't like school at all'

because they don't like the teachers and don't like being told what to do. She thinks that perhaps a lot of the people including her friends who skive off lessons 'can't be bothered'. She reports that she tried skiving once but 'it was not worth it because it caused me and me dad to fall out'.

Phyllis does not really like coming to school but likes seeing her friends at school. Although she likes learning new things she thinks that 'socialising is good'. In her view 'although school should be a priority, for me I put socialising first'. Additionally, she reports that although she wished she had worked hard she has still managed to meet friends. Phyllis is 'friend with loads of people' and there is not one person in Year 11 that she dislikes. She sees her friends after school and goes out with her friends on Fridays. Her opinion is that 'if I am stuck in the house I do feel a bit down I like going out'. She thinks that 'if you're good at socialising and talking you will be able to get along in life' and 'get a job'.

Phyllis recognises that school has some importance. She reports that school is 'good' and school helps because it prepares for everything': 'the whole idea of coming to school is 'not what you learn; coming to school on the whole and having teachers prepares you it makes you realise, it makes you think'. Although she finds that a few of the teachers have been unfair, Phyllis acknowledges that at times she has been the one 'messaging about' in lessons. She reports that she likes to work but 'when I can't do it I gets unfocused and at times I start messing around with my friends'. Phyllis states that she wished she 'had tried more

sometimes and worked hard'. She thinks that it is her fault that she has not done as well as she could of: 'I could have asked for help but I chose to mess about'. She recounts that she English, finds Geography difficult and struggles in Science. Although the teachers help a lot 'I struggle to remember and, revise, revise, and revise and somehow it just don't click in when it comes to do it'. She reports that she does not go out every night after school or on Sundays. When she is at home she sits in her room to do her work and to revise. She thinks that she will pass a few of her GCSE subjects. Phyllis wants to go to college to do Sport Science or wants to train to be a Health and Fitness Trainer or a Dietician. Although GCSE will help her to go to college, Phyllis thinks she 'can do it on her own', that is, to 'get a job and move up'. Phyllis reports that she has realised it now that it is worth going to school and that GCSE will help her to get on a course at college and get a job in the meantime. However 'I prefer to start to work and if I want to go to college I know what I want to do'.

Phyllis thinks that she would like to do more sports and less academics. She takes her football 'quite serious' and goes to football training after school. She reports that she can't smoke and is 'quite sensible when having a drink'. She reports that someone comes to give all members of the club a drug test: 'they don't tell you when they're coming they just come out of the blue like that'. Phyllis is happy about playing in the FA, which she sees as an important league. She reports that she just recently played her first game in the women's team as a reserve.

Mr. Pritchard sees Phyllis as 'a thorn in his side' and acknowledges that 'she is a real concern'. According to him 'she is not interested the slightest' and she 'has been reluctant to engage' and 'reluctant to do anything even after desperately trying to get her to engage', which caused her grades to suffer accordingly. Mr. Pritchard reports that Phyllis 'never has a pen or a book, she is very mouthy and rude to staff and wants to chat with her friends' Further, he states that 'she is really unhappy when she is made to work'. Mr. Pritchard reports that Phyllis has started to produce some reasonable work which had him to wonder 'if this was her work'. However, his opinion is that 'I can't see any evidence in her work that she's gonna make it'.

Mrs. Baird comments that she has seen little of Phyllis who 'has been in and out of school'. She reports that Phyllis has done little RE work. If Phyllis is with Marlene she gets no work done. However, Mrs. Baird states that when Marlene was absent she saw another side to Phyllis where 'she was polite, asked the right questions as if she wanted to work'.

Rachel's Story

Rachel describes herself as an 'outgoing' 15 year old girl who is 'not really quiet'. Mrs. Baird is of the view that that in term of personality, she does not have a problem with Rachel. Rachel has been at this school for five years and lives a bus ride away from the school in the catchment area. Rachel is currently in the top set at school. She recounts that she used to like school in Year Seven and Eight.

Rachel reports that 'school is alright but I just don't like it'. Rachel feels strongly against the idea of coming to school and openly states that 'I she dislike school'. She does not look forward to coming to school and wants to stay home. She stresses that school is 'a place I go until I leave'. Rachel does not appear to accept the school rule on attendance. She reports that she always leaves school and she is currently on a truancy report which I had to sign to show that she was with me at the time stated. She reports that she always truant on her own by 'walking to the bus stop and getting back home'. Rachel reckons that 'I don't do anything connected to school; I'm even going to the school prom although I may go'. This is the same view that Mr. Pritchard expresses when he reports that 'she stands out because she doesn't get involved in anything outside of lessons really'.

Rachel sees school as a place to meet friends. According to Mr. Pritchard, Rachel 'tends to circulate in peer groups' which he believes engage in negative behaviours. To him, 'she is more interested in her social life after school'. Rachel reports that she gets on with every one at school: 'I don't care much about the people at school; I speak to them when I choose'. She is happy to go out with her boyfriend. After school, on the days when she does not work, Rachel reports that she gets changed and goes, along with her friends, to her boyfriend's home and stay there. She also goes out with her boyfriend on Sunday nights.

Rachel's dislike of school is shown in her attitude to her lessons. Rachel's report indicates that she appears to exhibit a lackadaisical and 'I don't care' attitude during lessons. Rachel reports that some lessons like English are 'boring'. She goes to most lessons and occupies herself by just doing 'doodles and stuff like that' and that she 'is not bothered' by the teachers. Rachel reports that she hates studying and has 'not done home work for ages'. This account has been confirmed by both Ms. Baird and Mr. Pritchard.

Mrs. Baird view of Rachel's attitude to learning in class she is fine. 'It's doing the work at home that a problem'. She reports that Rachel did not do very well in her GCSE mock exam because there was lack of revision. According to Mr. Pritchard, 'her Key Stage Three grades suggest that "she should walk it"'. However he reports that Rachel is struggling to get a Grade C because 'she simply isn't doing anything at home'. Mr. Pritchard reports that although she can

do the work in school 'she sometimes arrives in lesson not really in a frame of mind for it'. He reports that 'she cannot engage', 'she was underachieving for a significant period of time and is starting to come around'. Rachel states that has already gotten her Maths at GCSE level and is of the view that she is going to do well in her GCSE exams. She reports that 'I'm not going to fail them' but I don't really need them and don't see the point in them. She also reports that 'I have learnt some things in school but it is just a lot of things that I will not need'.

Rachel's opinion is that school has not really prepared her for what she wanted to do. Her view is that 'All you do when you go to school is to learn to read and write, don't you? They teach you a lot of pointless stuff.' She is of the view that she does not need to know about subjects like Chemistry to do hairdressing. She appears upset at the fact that she was denied the opportunity to do Hairdressing as an option subject at college because 'she was too clever'. Rachel reports that 'training is better than going to school'. She quotes her Form Tutor who told her that 'the important thing is 'not how you learn but what you learn' and, 'GCSE is proving if you remember stuff'.

Rachel's life is centred on her job in a Hairdresser's shop and this may have had an influence on her school life. Rachel's job appears to take precedence over her school work. She wants to go straight to work when she leaves school. Rachel's firm views contrast with that of Mr. Pritchard. He believes that 'she is one of those kids who find it difficult to actually think about what is going to happen next to

them and who lacks a focus on what they want to do when they leave'. Rachel has been working in a Hairdresser's salon since she was 14 years and has been working there for over a year now. She works from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Wednesdays to Fridays and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays. Rachel reports that 'instead of school I would have liked to spend my days working'. Working is a means of 'getting money' and getting 'something to do instead of sitting home all the time doing nothing' and instead of 'being lazy and get other people's money'.

Appendix 7

Modified Phases of Thematic Analysis

The table shows the modified view of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Phase 2 of the table has been changed to reflect the use of case narratives in stead of transcripts.

	Phase	Description of the process
1	Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribing students' interview data, reading data and noting down initial ideas
2	Generating case narratives	Producing a descriptive case study for each student
3	Generating codes	Coding interesting features of the entire interview data set (both students' narratives and teachers' transcribed interview data), collecting data relevant to each code
4	Searching for themes and naming the themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering data relevant to each theme and generating names for each theme
5	Producing the reports	Selection of vivid extracts, relating the descriptive analysis to the research question(s) and literature producing a report of the analysis

Modified Phases of thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87)

Appendix 8

Description of School and Catchment Area

Introduction

The Redmoor Community High School (RCHS) is a mixed 11-16 secondary school of non denominational religion located in North East of Staffordshire in the West Midlands region of England. The account of the school, its intake and its catchment area is derived from interviews and/ or conversation with three staff members who have been teaching at the school for an average of fifteen years. Mrs. Baird has been teaching at the school for twenty nine years and is currently the Head of Department for Religious Education. Mr. Pritchard has been at employed at the school for thirteen years and is currently the Head of Department for Science. More recently, Mr. Douglas has been with the school from 2005 and is serving in the capacity of Form tutor.

Context of the school: Background

The teachers' account

Redmoor is depicted by the staff as a school that has undergone much change over the years. Mrs. Baird's testimony was that 29 years aback the school had attracted many students from a wide catchment area and had a promising future. However she recounted that: *'During my time here there have been five head teachers and after the first head teacher left three to four years later the school*

became rough'. This was also the sentiment shared by Mr. Pritchard who reported that: *'When I came here it was like Beirut, it really was very rough'*

This remained the state of affairs at RCHS until 1995 when a new head teacher was appointed. Both Mrs. Baird and Mr. Pritchard reported that the seeds of change had definitely been sown by the head when he took up office then. Mrs. Baird also related that although the school had failed its OFSTED in the month following his appointment, this failure was no fault of the head teacher. Rather, in his support, she put it down to previous 'bad management' and 'bad behaviour' on the part of students. She further explained that although the school was placed in special measures, the head teacher was able to 'move the school on'. Likewise, Mr. Pritchard thought that the head was a very good leader who had really instigated change in terms of management as well as teaching and learning skills. The corollary was that the school acquired a new identity as reflected in name change to the one currently being used. This is evidenced in the following statement by Mr. Pritchard:

'...he took the school through a very, very quick change. He really hit the ground: one, he was very visible and he introduced a lot more structure to the school and a lot stricter discipline so that by the time 1998, 1999 came around, the school was a completely different place and as a result it changed its name to RCHS'

After this head left six years later, events at Redmoor took a turn for the worse and teachers reported a decline in the school standards that had been set by him. In particular, Mr. Pritchard ascribed such change to the appointment of a female head. As he recalled:

'I sense that the em, the ethos of the school changed slightly and it became err how you say 'hard edged'. Still a caring school, very much a caring school but she didn't suffer fools lightly whether it was staff or pupils and she was very, very transparent in the way she(laughs) dealt with people and if she didn't think that people were not doing what they should she would make it very, very obvious'.

With the departure of this female head teacher a male replacement was made in 2006. Mr. Pritchard could only talk of the good qualities of this head teacher. However, I got the impression from his reaction during the interview that he was carefully managing his impression of the head teacher. He had thought hard about what he had said and had taken long pauses as the following statements seem to indicate:

'Now he is a, a, aHe is, he's a religious man, he's got very firm beliefs about how we should care for the kids and make sure that we provide for them and that is strength of his. He is very, he has empathy for the kids, that's not to say the others hadn't but it's a particular strength of his; and so much for the present day.'

Mr. Douglas who has been recently employed by the school spoke of the school in comparison to the one he had just left. To him, Redmoor stood in direct contrast to this five star, high performance school, where students had high aspirations and expectations.

The school's catchment and its intake

Both Mrs. Baird and Mr. Pritchard concurred that the school is situated on an affluent or fairly middle class housing estate and draws very few of its cohort from the surrounding areas. One reason for this decline as given by Mrs. Baird is that the individuals now living on the estate are from a new generation whose families have moved out of the estate. Although this may be true to a certain extent I reckon that the negative portrayal of the school may also have resulted in fewer parents opting for Redmoor as a school of choice for their children.

The school population is now approximately 500 students a far cry from what obtained when Mrs. Baird took up employment with the school twenty nine years earlier. Mrs. Baird recalled that at the inception of her teaching career at Redmoor, students who were bussed in from a wide catchment area almost 5 km (3.1 miles) away. However, at present, the most students are drawn from a smaller catchment area approximately 2.3 km (1.4 miles) in radius. Supporting evidence is given as follows:

'the area was much bigger we used to have three or four double Decker buses ... when I came in , now we've got three single Decker buses and they're not even full to capacity so it has been a big change over the years and the type of child that come to the school...'

Mrs. Baird also reported a change in the intake both in terms of family background and size. By the time Mr. Pritchard arrived sixteen years later the cohort was generally portrayed as hard core element from a certain ilk and remained as such at present. Hence, although Redmoor had realised some structural changes, Mr. Pritchard was of the view as the nature of the school's intake had not change much in the thirteen years he had been there.

Mrs. Baird described the school's catchment as socially deprived areas located on the outskirts of the town which drew almost three quarters of the school's intake. Mr. Pritchard was of the view that some parts of the catchment area were regarded as middle class areas; however, his further explanations suggested contrary. Supportive evidence is provided as follows:

'...I would say if you look at our free school meals ratio, it would suggest that we tend to have quite a significant proportion of em deprived households here as well. And err; we tend to have the complete batch. We have very, very able kids and em, we also have kids who have quite significant special needs, quite a lot going

on at home to be honest em you just have to look around the school and see some of the kids who come in late. I don' t want to mention names, but there are a lot of lads and girls you can see who have a lot going on outside school..'

Further supportive evidence is supplied by Mr. Douglas. The catchment is perceived by him to be an area with a fairly high proportion of rented or council housing consisting predominantly of single parent families. This contrasts markedly to the intake from his previous school, which were drawn from private housing in a middle class area. Mr. Douglas cites the single parent as a possible factor responsible for the poor behaviour of students at Redmoor. Accordingly, he has explained it in this way:

'quite a lot of single parent families in this school I am not sure what the population is, e.g. in the year eleven engineering class the only two trouble makers in the class are from single parent families.'

**EXPLORING
THE SCHOOLING EXPERIENCE
OF
DISENGAGED GIRLS
AGED 15-16 YEARS**

Submitted in part fulfilment for Master of Research in Education
The Open University

By Uthel Laurent, Bsc (Hons), PGCE

September 2008

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives and schooling experiences of 15–16 year-old girls judged by their teachers to be disengaged. This research, which was based on an interactionist ethnographic approach, also served as a pilot for future research on disengagement. A sample of three teachers and five students participated in individual interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. The narrative-based thematic analysis yielded five main themes which reflected various aspects of the lived experiences of the girls.

The findings revealed that as students sought to create their sense of self they seemed preoccupied with certain interests which appeared to be more of a priority in their lives. The corollary was that school, though recognised for its instrumental value, appeared to be less relevant to them. As such, students showed signs of coping with their circumstances by engaging in behaviours consistent with various forms of disengagement from school and learning.

From an interactionist ethnographic approach, documenting the experiences of young people is crucial as their voices have great potential in shaping the future direction of educational research into school disengagement (Hammersley, 1999; Ball, 2003). In this regard, this project has great potential in paving the way for future research to illuminate the process of disengagement. Hence, the use of complementary sources of data might shed light on the structural influences and

social resources that pupils may draw upon to shape their student and self identity.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to all my family and friends who supported me in even in the smallest of ways during my studies. I encountered many obstacles during my studies, which I couldn't overcome without you.

I am indebted to my supervisors, Mr. Donald Mackinnon and Dr. Janet Collins who, against all odds and in such short time frame, provided much support and encouragement throughout the undertaking of my dissertation. Your assistance went a long way in boosting my self confidence and in helping me to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

I also extend my sincere gratitude to Professor Martyn Hammersley who has been a great source of guidance, assistance, comfort and motivation to me especially during my times of despair when I lost all hope. Thank you for going all out of your way to ensure that my physical, mental and psychological wellbeing was maintained during my study.

Above all, I thank the Lord God for giving me the health, strength, wisdom and understanding to see me through the completion of this research.

Table of Contents

Tables, Figures and Appendices	7
CHAPTER ONE.....	8
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	8
1.1 <i>Introduction</i>	8
1.2 <i>Background to Research</i>	9
1.3 <i>Aims and Objectives</i>	11
1.4 <i>Resume of the Chapters</i>	11
CHAPTER TWO.....	14
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
2.1 <i>Defining disengagement</i>	14
2.2 <i>Significance of disengagement</i>	17
2.3 <i>Disengagement and Identity</i>	20
2.4 <i>Justification for Qualitative research into disengagement</i>	21
2.5 <i>An examination of disengagement-related research</i>	24
CHAPTER THREE	28
METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION.....	28
3.1 <i>Research Methodology</i>	28
3.1.2 <i>The Ethnographic Approach</i>	29
3.1.3 <i>Educational Ethnography</i>	29
3.1.4 <i>Reflexivity</i>	30
3.2 <i>Research Design</i>	31
3.2.2 <i>Data Analysis</i>	34
CHAPTER FOUR	36
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS.....	36
4.1 <i>Data Collection</i>	36
4.1.2 <i>Recruiting the participants</i>	37
4.1.3 <i>Collecting data from participants</i>	39
4.1.4 <i>Ethical considerations</i>	40
4.2 <i>Data analysis</i>	41
4.2.1 <i>Data analysis Procedure</i>	41

4.2.2	<i>Analysis of Interview Data</i>	42
4.2.3	<i>Analysis of Case Narratives</i>	44
4.3	<i>Reflecting on Roxanne's behaviour</i>	58
CHAPTER FIVE		60
DATA INTERPRETATION		60
5.1	<i>Introduction</i>	60
5.2	<i>Discussion</i>	60
CHAPTER SIX		68
FINDINGS		68
6.1	<i>Introduction</i>	68
6.2	<i>Summary of Findings</i>	68
6.3	<i>Methodological issues</i>	69
6.4	<i>Limitation of research and implications for further research</i>	71
6.5	<i>Conclusion</i>	73
REFERENCES		74
APPENDICES		78

Tables, Figures and Appendices

Table 1: Potential Participants identified by teachers.....	34
Appendix 1: Dimensions of Disengagement.....	72
Appendix 2: Interview Schedules.....	73
Appendix 3: Excerpts from Transcribed Interviews.....	75
Appendix 4: Letter and Consent Form.....	80
Appendix 5: Letters of Research Approval.....	83
Appendix 6 Case Narratives of Students.....	87
Appendix 7: Modified Phases of Thematic Analysis	98
Appendix 8: Description of School and Catchment Area.....	99

CHAPTER ONE

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 Introduction

Disengagement from learning and school in general has been acknowledged by the British government as a major challenge for those directly concerned with the educational welfare of students (Steedman and Stoney, 2004). In this regard, Dr. Geoff Hayward, one of the directors of Nuffield 14-19 Review, in his presentation at the Engaging Youth Enquiry (2007) acknowledged that 'many young people face complex and diverse challenges and have needs and interests that have not been met by the education system over the last twenty years'. As such, disengagement among young people continues to be a reality in many British schools and, for some students, disengagement increases as they go through the school (Black, 2006). Thus, during this developmental stage of their lives, some of them become preoccupied in other interests. School seems to have little relevance in their lives and is given less priority. Consequently, these students appear to manifest various forms of behaviour consistent with disengagement from school and learning. In the context of pupil learning, the term disengagement has been used in various ways and may have different meanings to writers and researchers alike. It is therefore important to unpick the notions of disengagement if educationalists are to find ways to adequately tackle this

mounting problem. The definition and nature of disengagement will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

One drawback with much of the research into disengagement is that there is extensive use of statistics which rely on indicators such as truancy, drop-out or even exclusion to identify and deal with disengaged pupils. These quantitative measures are inadequate as they do not reflect the myriad ways in which disengagement is played out in school. Hence, this signals the need for more qualitative approaches to allow for a more holistic exploration of the process of disengagement. Another problem with current studies on disengagement is that most researches seem to gloss over female disengagement as insignificant in explaining school outcomes. Research seems to suggest that girls outperform boys in secondary schools and as such boys are more prone to disengagement than girls (McIntosh and Houghton, 2005). In this regard, this research sought to explore female disengagement at the secondary level as an under-researched area within the field of education.

1.2 Background to Research

My teaching experiences in Britain have been pivotal in carving the direction of my research. In the public secondary schools where I have taught, a number of students, particularly girls, appeared to show visible signs of disengagement from learning and continuously displayed what has seemed to me to be a dismissive

and uninterested attitude to school in general. Yet, my experience and observations at these school revealed that considerable effort was made to tailor learning to meet the needs of the students, and to improve school standards through curriculum changes and continuous assessment and monitoring. Alongside these school-based approaches, many other devised programmes of intervention have been directed at addressing barriers to learning, improving academic achievements and raising educational standards. Nonetheless, an abatement of disengagement is yet to be realised. In this regard, Broadhurst et al. (2005) argued that policy initiatives such as Sure Start, Connexions and Education Action Zone among others targeted at those most at risk of disengaging have proved to be inadequate. They contended that although these initiatives have been welcomed, there remains a sustained critique of government programmes. Hence, the plethora of these programme initiatives which have been emerging seem to suggest that current explanations do not target root causes of disengagement. Therefore, this calls for an exploration of disengagement by listening to the experiences of those pupils as a possible way forward.

Although the views of teachers, educators and other professionals may be significant in highlighting qualities of disengaged students, the most valid perceptions should come from those who are themselves key characters in this process. In this regard, pupils' voice is crucial in the exploration of the process of disengagement as they often have 'a rich but untapped understanding of

processes and events' (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000). When the views of these young people are considered then we can begin to fully understand their experiences and perspectives of school: the role of school in their lives as well as their adaptive responses to the process of schooling. Further, we can have more grounded information to allow for the identification of appropriate ways to cater for the needs of disengaged students. One suitable way to capture pupils' voice is by permitting them to describe views and feelings through the use of interviews which has been the data gathering instrument proffered in this research.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

This research aimed to explore the perspectives and schooling experience of disengaged girls aged 15-16 years. In keeping with the stated aims of the project, my research sought to answer the following questions:

- 1 What does a narrative-based thematic analysis reveals about the 'lived' schooling experiences in the lives of disengaged girls aged 15–16 years?
- 2 How effective are semi-structured interviews as data collection tools in conducting ethnographic research?

1.4 Resume of the Chapters

In Chapter Two, I present a literature review showing the complex character of disengagement. I also draw on the work of Lessard et al. (2008) and Pollard and

Filer (2005) to argue for the use of interviews and thematic analysis to capture the experiences of these young people.

Chapter Three provides a rationale for the use of the interviews within an interactionist perspective. Having reviewed the advantages of interviews and some of the problems surrounding their use, this chapter justifies the use of interviews as the preferred research instrument. It also argues for the use of a modified thematic analysis which is consistent with an ethnographic research tradition.

In Chapter Four I describe the procedures used for collecting and analysing the data. I also present an analysis of the students' perspectives of their schooling experience. The emerging themes showed that there is a need to understand what occurs in schools as well as how students live outside of school to fully understand their perceived disengagement to school and learning.

In Chapter Five I interpret the main findings in light of the research aims. Hence, I draw on the literature reviewed in Chapter Two as well as other literature to make sense of the first research question.

Chapter Six presents a summary of the main findings. It considers the second research question as well as methodological issues and limitations of the

research. It also puts forward some recommendations for future research. The chapter ends with a brief conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining disengagement

The literature has attested to the complex nature of the term disengagement which has been defined in many ways and has been opened to various interpretations. For instance, disengagement has been substituted for terms such as disaffection, disidentification, and alienation (Fredricks et al. 2004; Libbey, 2004; Williams and Pritchard, 2006). Disengagement has also been employed in the research literature as the antithesis to engagement (Marks, 2000; Fredericks et al. 2004; Smyth, 2006). Additionally, some writers conceived it in terms of a withdrawal from education or 'disconnection with academics' (McMillan, 2003; McIntosh and Houghton, 2005). While McIntosh and Houghton (2005) examined disengagement in terms of students' relationship to school, others such as Pollard and Filer (2005) saw it in terms pupils' relationship to learning. In spite of these various interpretations, some researchers appeared to be examining the same construct. Thus, McMillan's (2003) use of academic disengagement seemed to be similar to McIntosh and Houghton's (2005) use of educational disengagement as well as Broadhurst et al.'s (2005) school disengagement. In view of these conceptual issues, Libbey (2004) argued that the use of various terms to study school engagement [and disengagement] has created 'an overlapping and confusing definitional spectrum'. Likewise, Fredricks

et al. (2004) argued that current definitions of engagement [and disengagement] have incorporated such a wide variety of constructs that the term now 'suffers from being everything to everybody' (p. 84).

The literature has revealed three interrelated approaches to the study of disengagement which I summarised as context approach, dimension approach and predictor-outcome approach. Researchers who espoused a context approach analysed disengagement in terms of the context in which it occurred such as school and or classroom learning (Broadhurst et al. 2005; Pollard and Filer, 2005). Studies that emphasised a predictor-outcome approach used various measures to identify the disengaged as well as the consequences of disengagement. Such measures included absenteeism, achievement, dropout, exclusion, graduation, truancy, and underperformance, suspension (see Fredericks et al. 2004). Research that reflected a dimensional approach focused on behavioural, emotional and cognitive aspects of disengagement (Appendix 1). This approach elaborated in the work of Balfanz et al. (2007) formed the conceptual foundation of this study. In particular, Balfanz et al.'s (2007) use of the behavioural, cognitive and emotional dimensions helped to overcome the temptation to focus on a limited view of pupils' experiences as had been the case with the context or predictor-outcome approach. Hence, a dimensional view incorporated both a context and predictor-outcome approach. It was therefore expected to provide construct clarity and to overcome definitional and measurement problems.

Drawing upon Fredericks et al. (2004) review on student engagement, Balfanz et al. (2007) conceptualised disengagement as:

a high order factor consisting of correlated sub-factors measuring different dimensions of the process of detaching from school, disconnecting from its norms and expectations, reducing effort and involvement at school, and withdrawing from a commitment to school and to school completion (p. 224).

Such a multi dimensional definition found expression in this study as it was all embracing and covered several aspects of students' relationship (behaviour, attitude and experience) to learning and school. As elements of the process of disengagement, the notions of 'detaching' and 'disconnecting' conveyed the idea of emotional, mental or physical separation for the pupil, leading to a range of related consequences as identified within a predictor-outcomes approach. Hence, this holistic view of disengagement saw students' behaviour, cognition and emotions as an interrelated part of the individual and allowed for a rich characterisation of individuals (Fredricks et al. 2004). Additionally, this broad definition was compatible with my research which sought to explore students' schooling experiences. To this end, the use of ethnographic interviews grounded in students' perspectives allowed for a better understanding of the complexity of disengagement to school and learning.

2.2 Significance of disengagement

Disengagement among young people has seemed to be persisting and has been widely believed to be a growing problem in the western world. For instance, a review of research in nine European countries showed that the problem of young people's disengagement from education and learning was a shared concern (Kendall and Kinder, 2005). Additionally, Black (2006) noted that, in nearly every OECD* country the prevalence of disengagement varies significantly from school to school. Marks (2000) also claimed that disengagement is still a pervasive problem predominantly in US secondary schools where chronic disengagement reportedly afflicts 40%-60% of students, an estimate that excludes repeated absentees and dropouts. This view was echoed by Smyth (2006) who argued that 'students are switching off, tuning out and dropping out of high school in the USA and most other western countries at alarming rates' and 'reformers are at a complete loss as to what to do' (p. 285). With reference to the UK, McIntosh and Houghton (2005) argued that 'there remains a hard core of people who seem resistant to all efforts to engage in learning and these seriously disengaged seem to be impervious to change' (p. 9). As such, this persistence of disengagement was cause for concern and justified the need to carry out further research in that area.

* Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Internationally, much research has shown that school disengagement intensifies as students progress through secondary or high school (Marks, 2000; Steedman and Stoney, 2004; Black, 2006). Research also indicated that females are consistently more academically engaged than males (Marks, 2000; Fredricks et al. 2004; McIntosh and Houghton, 2005; Balfanz et al. 2007). Hence, a focus on girls was warranted at a time when current educational debates in the UK and other western countries seemed to remain highly concerned with the issue of boys' underachievement (see Archer et al. 2007).

Disengagement has been strongly associated with student and school outcomes and has provided information for designing interventions to improve the educational prognosis of students at risk (Finn and Rock, 1997; Libbey, 2004). For example, in the UK, the Rathbone/Nuffield 14-19 Review (2007) has sought to provide an improved understanding of the varying and complex needs, aspirations and experiences of those pupils most at risk of becoming educationally disengaged and how they could be supported. Although attention had been paid to the voices and experiences of pupils, the study considered those who were not in education, employment and training (NEET). By comparison, this study placed emphasis on documenting the experiences of those students who were still at school; it was hoped that this focus would have offered other dimensions to the exploration of disengagement that could help to inform more preventative rather than corrective measures.

Nevertheless, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in its 14-19 reforms has embarked on a new 14–16 re-engagement programme to tackle pre-16 pupils who are lower achievers or at the risk of disengaging. However, it seemed that schools, teachers and teaching became the object of critique and accountability and relatively less attention had been placed on examining the schooling experiences of students. This has led some researchers to argue that over the past twenty years or more educational policies have not been effective in meeting their stated purpose and have apparently proved to be futile (Smyth, 2006). As such, policy efforts have focused on poorly envisaged reprocessed formulas as well as ingenuous exploratory drives that need to be discarded (ibid).

Disengagement cannot be understated as it has serious social and financial implications for both the individual and society. Lessard et al. (2008) acknowledged research which indicates that disengaged young people would lack the competencies needed to integrate into the workforce, have difficulties finding work and suffer from psychological and emotional maladjustment (p. 26). Hence, there is need to ensure that the lives, knowledge, bodies and energies of young people are at the centre of the classroom and school to enable engaged learning to occur (see Black 2006). In addition, students need to feel that schooling is simply worth the emotional or psychological investment necessary to warrant their serious involvement in school (Smyth, 2006). This can only be done when their lives, experiences culture and aspirations are taken in consideration

instead of being ignored or trivialized (ibid). In this regard, this study is a timely contribution as it is a step closer in providing better diagnosis of the nature and extent of disengagement, which will pave the way for more effective ways of tackling this problem.

2.3 Disengagement and Identity

The notion of identity was of crucial importance to this study, which focused on documenting the views of young people. These individuals often struggle to come to terms with their situation as they concurrently strive to construct their sense of self and cope with developmental pressures characteristic of puberty. As such, Garnier et al. (2007) (cited by Lessard et al. 2008) argued that school disengagement is exacerbated in the period of adolescence where individuals face 'multiple problems'. This suggests that many challenges, including the onset of adolescence, may all combine to promote student disengagement. In this regard, Rudduck and Flutter (2000) contended that many young people find themselves involved in complex relationships and situations outside of the school context and some of them are accustomed to the responsibility and autonomy that their lives outside of school afford. Accordingly, Dwyer and Wynn (2001) argued that young people are much more than students; for many of them the other aspects of their lives are even more important. Smyth (2006) concurred and argued that 'school failure is inextricably bound up with the process of doing 'identity work'; where school is no longer seen as a viable place in which to do

identity work students drop out of school'. In this regard, Steinberg (1996) contended that some students view school as a nuisance and place it at the bottom of their list of priorities. He argued that their social lives seem to matter far more than their education and, for American students, disengagement is related more to the conditions of their lives outside of school than to what takes place within the school walls.

The above literature suggests that students' learning or disengagement choices form part of the wider construction of their sense of self. Hence, any identity issues cannot be adequately understood without giving voice to the young people whose lives are being affected. In this regard, Rudduck and Flutter (2000) argued that we should avoid the 'bracketing out' of young people's voice as this act 'is founded on an outdated view of childhood which fails to acknowledge children's capacity to reflect on issues affecting their lives' (p 86). The notions of identity and human agency are central to Symbolic Interactionism which formed the theoretical basis of this study, as explained in the following chapter.

2.4 Justification for Qualitative research into disengagement

This research sought to explore the nature of disengagement through the use of qualitative interviews intended to capture students' views on their schooling experiences. Studies which have focused explicitly on the issue of disengagement have tended to rely mainly on quantitative methods. For example,

in a review of thirty nine (dis)engagement studies by Fredricks et al. (2004), 28 of these were quantitative studies and only seven focused mainly on qualitative methods of data collection. This lends credence to the view there has been abundant published literature concerning the measurement of disengagement as predictors or outcomes of learning and schooling, and relatively less research about the subjective experience of young people.

One criticism levelled at current quantitative studies of disengagement is that they do not tap on qualitative differences in level of disengagement. For example, Fredricks et al. (2004) argued that the majority of studies make use of teacher rating scales and student self-report surveys which combine aspects of students' behaviour (such as conduct, participation and persistence) in one single scale. Such methods do not cater for differences in observed or reported behaviour and therefore do not allow for the analysis of subtle or more profound manifestations of disengagement (ibid). Additionally, these statistics yield a 'fragmented decontextualised picture' which may not be representative of the lived experiences of those involved in the process (see Smyth, 2006). Hence, there is need to study the human side to the stories that statistics do not tell by allowing youths a voice in describing their experiences (ibid).

Researchers have confirmed the need for rich insights provided by pupils' experiences and have argued for the exploration of school processes from pupils' perspectives. For instance, Fredricks et al. (2004) argued that thick contextual

descriptions are needed to enhance our understanding of phenomena [like disengagement]. These will help to explain individual and cultural differences and will shed light on why some students begin to disengage from school. Smyth (2006) and Lessard et al. (2008) also agreed with the use of qualitative methods to study the process of disengagement from the perspective of the participant.

Accordingly, Smyth (2006) argued that:

If we really want to understand phenomena like dropping out or disengagement from school and make dramatic inroads into them we need to access the meanings of these concepts... [and] explore them from the standpoint or positional lenses of the existential experiences of young people... (p. 288).

Smyth's (2006) view pointed to the fact that young people's experience can be relied upon as vital sources which can fuel change in schools. However, it must be noted that pupil's views should not be examined in isolation but in tandem with other avenues of reform as well. Nonetheless, this view justified the use of ethnographic research methods to highlight the diverse experiences of students deemed to be disengaged. In this regard, this research employed ethnographic interviews as a means of exploring what students say about their schooling and learning experiences.

2.5 An examination of disengagement-related research

Although not expressly concerned with disengagement, the work of Lessard et al. (2008) set the stage for the exploration of the nature of disengagement among young people. Lessard et al. (2008) saw disengagement as a gradual stage in the dropout process. In their research, they adopted semi-structured interviews to study school dropout. Following Seidman (1991), they employed an interview protocol to establish trust and build a rapport with participants as a means of encouraging rich descriptions. The transcribed interviews were reduced to shorter narratives which were then subjected to further analysis at a conceptual level. Lessard et al. (2008) concluded that the lived experiences provided a more vivid portrayal of the interplay of risk factors that determined the response adopted by the dropouts. The use of semi-structured interviews in this research was anticipated to offer a rich description of the extent of students' disengagement. Similarly, this research focused its initial analysis at a descriptive level through the use of narrative case studies depicting the experiences of students. However, unlike the work of Lessard et al. (2008), this study focused on documenting the experiences of disengaged students who were still at school and employed semi-structured interviews based on the work of Kvale (1996).

The work of Pollard and Filer (2005) ILP came close to my research initiative, but it was limited in certain respects. In contrast to Lessard et al. (2008), Pollard and Filer (2005) focused their research initiative in the UK. Like Lessard et al. (2008),

they did not set out to explore disengagement per se. Nonetheless, their research findings alluded to behaviours consistent with the process of disengaging from learning and can therefore be applied to a discourse on disengagement.

In their longitudinal ethnographic study called Identity and Learning Programme (ILP), Pollard and Filer (2005) sought to account for social influences on learning in compulsory secondary education, as young people develop through adolescence. The theoretical origins of their design lay in the tradition of symbolic interaction with the incorporation of emergent views or insights which would shed light on the issues being investigated. Thus, in keeping with symbolic interactionist views, their study pointed to the role of agency in shaping and maintaining students' sense of self and identity. The interactionist perspective also formed the theoretical platform of my research. Hence, this research drew upon the interactionist notions of 'agency' and 'identity' to enhance the understanding of students' disengagement.

Pollard and Filer (2005) examined students learning within the wider structural discourses of class and gender and had not conducted a detailed exploration of the nature of disengagement. In contrast, this study began at a micro level by documenting the perspectives of girls who had been identified by their teachers as disengaged. Although it can be argued that teachers' definition of disengagement may not be in keeping with students' definition of their situation, teachers' views served as a means of elucidating the complex nature of

disengagement. Further, given my previous teaching background, the use of teachers' definition avoided the temptation to impose my personal views on the analysis of the research data.

The ILP sample consisted of 17 students (eight girls and nine boys) from nine different secondary schools that were drawn from two different socio economic communities. Although that sample provided a platform to identify a variety of learning behaviour, the use of nine schools may have introduced other variables that could have influenced the findings. It was hoped that possible threats to validity was minimised in this research with the use of one school. In this light, my study took a more narrow focus, concentrating on girls from a specific catchment area who were all attending the same secondary school.

Pollard and Filer (2005) relied on a wide range of data collection tools which provided a rich source of data on which they based their findings. Like Lessard et al. (2008), they used a descriptive analysis involving the construction of rich narratives, which formed the basis for the use of theoretical modelling at the second level of analysis. By comparison, this study did not allow for the use of triangulated methods. Hence, in view of the scale of this project, I focused on assessing the feasibility of ethnographic interviews in providing substantial data that would shed light on the experiences of the students.

From their findings Pollard and Filer (2005) were able to deduce the characteristics of pupils that they classed as disengaged. They were also able to identify a typology of pupils' pattern of relationship, orientation and adaptive response to school which illustrated the complex nature of [dis]engagement. Additionally, Pollard and Filer (2005) found that students' learning experience and their perception of what it meant to be a learner were an integral part of their attempts to make sense of their lives. They also established that home, school and peer group factors all interacted to influence learner's identity as part of their wider construction of themselves.

My research question led me to direct my efforts at exploring disengagement as a multi dimensional construct. In this regard, instead of focusing on learning specifically, I considered students' disengagement to both learning and school in general. Further, the use of a narrative-based thematic analysis did not allow for the construction of a typology of disengagement but it paved the way for further exploration of the myriad ways in which disengaged students responded to school.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

3.1 Research Methodology

3.1.1 Introduction

This research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What does a narrative-based thematic analysis reveals about the 'lived' schooling experiences in the lives of disengaged girls aged 15–16 years?
2. How effective are semi-structured interviews as data collection tools in conducting ethnographic research?

These questions required information on how students perceived school and their learning, which offered a vivid portrayal of their experiences. Data was collected through the use of interviews and was subject to thematic analysis as part of an ethnographic research tradition. The first section of the chapter provides a rationale for the theoretical basis of this research. The second section assesses some possible methods that could be used within an ethnographic research design before outlining and justifying the preferred research design.

3.1.2 The Ethnographic Approach

This study employed an Educational Ethnographic Approach based on the theory of Symbolic Interactionism to explore students' perspectives of their schooling and learning experience. An Ethnographic Approach seeks to document what is going on in a particular situation or setting with a view to understanding other people's own world-view and to capturing detailed aspects of their social life (Taylor, 2006). This implies 'a commitment to a search for meaning, a suspension of preconceptions and an orientation to discovery' (Ball, 2003:32). There is much innovation and variety within recent ethnographic research as illustrated by the use of 'multiple approaches to data collection, analysis and project design' (Taylor, 2006). Hence, Ethnography ranges from the use of extended studies of communities to a relatively small scale projects in which the principal form of data is audio recorded talk (ibid). This variety is also reflected in the theoretical underpinnings as well. Accordingly, Hammersley (1999) has argued that the Interactionist Ethnographic Approach has changed over the years to reflect different challenges and thus allows for the integration of other ideas or methods that would help to shed light on the data.

3.1.3 Educational Ethnography

Educational Ethnography has been largely founded on the theoretical basis of Symbolic Interactionism. From an Interactionist Perspective, human actions are based on social or cultural meanings and individuals are seen as meaning makers, informing and shaping their social world (Hammersley, 1999). Hence,

an Interactionist Ethnographic Approach focuses on researching the perspectives, experience and actions of pupils but without abandoning the key role of the researcher (Hammersley, 1999; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Although the emphasis in most school ethnographies is almost entirely on classroom life, Ball (2003) has argued for a wider focus to allow researchers to know more about the lives of those that they study. This is important since students are not one-dimensional characters but may portray different selves in different settings. Thus, in order to understand the social life of students we need not only to concentrate on what takes place in the classroom but should also focus on other aspects of their lives as well. In light of Ball's (2003) view and in keeping with a focus on the multi dimensional conception of disengagement, this research considered other facets of students' lives out of the school that would help to shed light on their perceived disengagement.

3.1.4 Reflexivity

According to Ball (2003), the conduct of ethnographic work relies fundamentally on the social relations skills of the researcher which requires careful planning. Hence in this research it was necessary to consider the effects of reactivity that may have resulted from the interactions with participants. Being reflective allows researchers to reflect on their own interactions, feelings and make this clear in their report. Moreover, in view of the general criticisms of ethnographic work, Ball (2003) argued that reflexivity allows the researcher to connect the processes of data collection and data analysis to help ensure rigour in the research. Hence,

researchers should make sense of the research process by recounting the processes, problems, choices and errors that emerged during the fieldwork (ibid). This element of reflexivity was relevant to my research and was acknowledged during the conduct of the interviews, as explained in the following section.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Rationale for Research Instrument

The expressed aim of this research was to document the schooling experience of disengaged girls to shed light on the notion of school disengagement. In this regard, this study employed semi-structured interviews underpinned by guidelines described by Kvale (1996). Further, this research also served as a pilot to examine the feasibility of interviews in exploring educational disengagement from school and learning. Apart from the use of interviews, data for this research could have been collected through the use of observations, semi-structured questionnaires or documentary evidence.

Qualitative observation could have provided a rich description of behaviours and interactions in a specific natural setting rather than a numeric summary of occurrence or durations of observed behaviours. To fully understand the nature of disengagement and student experiences, I would have to observe students in a variety of settings both in and out of the school context. This would necessitate

successfully negotiating access, adopting a role as well as developing and maintaining trust with participants, which would not be possible in such short time frame. I would also have to consider the ethical issues involved in gaining parental consent for whole class observation even if the focus would be on observing some students within a classroom setting.

The use of personal and official documentaries could have added to the richness of the information gained on the extent of students' disengagement or to verify information given by other methods. However, on their own they would present an inadequate picture of the nature of disengagement. Also, given the scale of the project, semi-structured questionnaires could have been an appropriate data collection alternative. However, like documentaries, much vital information would be lost through this method thus limiting students' descriptions of their experiences.

Given time restraints, interviews seemed to be appropriate and practicable. Interviews are often chosen over other ethnographic methods because in addition to their economical value, they can generate information on motives behind actions and feelings (Seale, 1998). In particular semi-structured interviews can provide rich authentic insights into the actions, attitudes, beliefs and experiences of individuals and can inform about stable patterns of their behaviour (ibid). Unlike the semi-structured questionnaire, they allow for immediate follow-up and clarification of responses (Ary et al. 2006). This research advocated the use of

individual interviewing over other methods of interview. One reason is that it is not feasible to focus attention on a particular respondent in a focus group discussion. Hence, it is more beneficial to use individual interviews to gain richer details about personal experiences, decisions and actions (Gaskell, 2000). Additionally, some students may not readily participate in discussions and therefore much individual experiences may be lost during group interviews or focus groups discussions.

The reliance on interviews as a primary tool to document experiences has been challenged on methodological grounds. Critics have argued that interviews are essentially contextually situated social interactions where informants' responses are driven more by a preoccupation with self presentation and/or with the persuasion of others than with a view to providing accurate accounts (see Hammersley and Gomm, 2005). Hence, interview data are likely to be affected by error or bias and are accused of being contaminated by what takes place in the interview context, which render them useless for analytic purpose (ibid).

However, Hammersley and Gomm (2005) argued that interviews are no more likely to be affected by reactivity than other methods. Thus, these threats to validity do not render the interview inaccurate or invalid; nor do they deny the fact that people have unique personal experiences that they can talk about or that they have distinct sources of information that may not be immediately accessible to others (ibid). Hammersley and Gomm (2005) contended that at most, these

radical criticisms influence us to be more circumspect in the inferences drawn from interview data but do not rule out the use of interviews as a source of information.

In this regard, Hammersley and Gomm (2005) advocated the need to recognise the threats to interviews and to assess the interview data in light of these threats. They also advocated the need to be aware of the methodological and practical defects and to be reflective in the interpretation and analysis of the findings. This can be done by taking into account the sources of biases that can arise out of the interview context. This element of reflexivity is certainly in keeping with an ethnographic research process. For example, in this research it was necessary to consider the effects of reactivity during the conduct of the interview. This is because my ethnic and cultural status as a Black, non-British researcher might have affected how informants related to me in the interview context. However, it was anticipated that reactivity effects would be minimised due to the fact that I had previously taught in that particular school, and that the students already knew me as 'teacher'. It was hoped that this association would prove to be beneficial in building trust and rapport with the participants.

3.2.2 Data Analysis

In keeping with an ethnographic research tradition, the search for pattern proceeded through the use of a modified version of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Hence, as a preliminary stage, I constructed case narratives

grounded in students' experiences as a basis for the thematic analysis. This enabled me to be familiar with the data and was expected to facilitate the process of analysis. It was also anticipated that this phase would overcome the tendency to use the questions put to the informant as themes, a practice which has been cited as a pitfall of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis has the benefit of serving as a useful guide for researchers new to qualitative research and can be applied across a range of theoretical approaches (ibid). In this regard, thematic analysis can be endorsed as a 'flexible foundational method' that is suited for ethnographic studies with the aim of providing rich descriptions (ibid).

As a critical aspect of this research, the analysis and interpretation of the findings also took into account the sources of biases that arose out of the interview context. Such a reflective practice has been endorsed by both Ball (2003) and Gomm and Hammersley (2005).

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Data Collection

4.1.1 Phases of Data Collection

The data collection proceeded in two phases:

Phase One:

This phase set the stage for the selection of students, judged by their teachers to be disengaged, for participation in the project. This involved conducting interviews with teachers to gain their views on their experience of teaching Year 11 students, from which potential participants could be selected. The selected teachers all had daily contact with the Year 11 students. The teachers were interviewed during the last week of April, 2008.

A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 2) was drawn up, which included guiding questions focusing on two main areas:

- The context of research: - themes included professional background of the teacher, a description of the school, its catchment and intake.

- Teachers' description of the students: - comparing students from different ability groups in terms of behaviour, personality, performance, attitude, and background among other traits.

An hour long interview was conducted with a Science teacher (hereafter called Mr. Pritchard) who reported that he taught 110 of the 120 Year 11 cohort. He also served as Head of Science. In addition, two other teachers agreed to take part in a relatively shorter interview. One teacher (hereafter called Mrs. Baird) taught all the Year 11 students and served as Head of Religious Education (RE), while the other teacher (hereafter called Mr Douglas) served as a Year 11 Form Tutor. Excerpts from the teachers' interview transcript are presented in Appendix 3.

Phase Two

In this phase the participants were selected and interviewed. I employed a 'typical case' sampling method, a variation of purposive sampling, by selecting students who are considered by their teacher to be disengaged (see Ary et al. 2006). In this regard, sample selection was based on the analysis of information gathered from taped interviews with the three teachers. However, two other sources may have influenced my final decision, as will be explained shortly.

4.1.2 Recruiting the participants

As my first point of contact for conducting the field work, I met with the Head of Year 11 during the month of April, who supplied me with a list of potential

students to interview along with some performance data on some of these students. I consequently received advice from this Head of Year and Head of RE as to the students they believed would make good interview subjects. However, in selecting the sample I went against their advice in some cases and selected participants whom I perceived would best allow me to explore the process of disengagement. My final selection was based on students' performance and attitude to learning as gleaned from the teachers' reports. However, in retrospect, I felt that my prior knowledge of the student (whom I had taught) might have affected my selection as well. Table 1 below shows how the participants were selected.

Table 1: Potential participants identified by teachers

Student (Pseudonym)	Ability Group*	Head of Year	Head of Dep't Science	Head of Dep't RE	Form Tutor	Teachers' reasons for (non)selection	Final Selection by Researcher
Annette	1	√ GC	√ SC	√ LC	NA	Talks well	√
Elsa	3	√ GC	√ GC	√ GC	NA	Talks well	√
Emily	4	√ GC	NA	√ GC	NA	Talks well	X
Kate	2	√ GC	NA	NA	√ GC	Talks well	X
Marlene	3	√ GC	√ GC	X GC	NA	Absent often	√
Phyllis	3	√ GC	√ GC	X GC	NA	May not talk	√
Rachel	1	√ GC	√ SC	X LC	X GC	May not talk	√
Roxanne	3	X GC	√ GC	X GC	NA	Too quiet	√

KEY

√ = selected

X = not selected

NA = information not available

GC = Great Concern

SC = Some Concern

LC = Little Concern

* Selection based on ability rankings for science lessons ranging from Set 1-highest ability to Set 5- lowest ability.

The final sample consisted of six Year 11 girls drawn from Ability Sets 1 and 3, which had been the basis of Mr. Pritchard's discussion of disengagement. The sample reflected the catchment of the school being all White British-born individuals. Selected participants were met individually to discuss the nature of the projects including the ethical issues involved. Students were given an information booklet and consent form to read and take home for their consent as well as for parental or guardian consent (Appendix 4). Since, participation was voluntary students were given one week to decide whether they wanted to be interviewed. All consent forms were received, and students were interviewed during the second week in May, 2008. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes.

4.1.3 Collecting data from participants

Having selected the sample, another semi-structured interview schedule was drawn up (Appendix 2). It consisted of open-questions (as a guide) that would shed light on students' experiences of school and their learning. The schedule was not piloted but questions were discussed with supervisors and were modified to allow for fewer questions which were more open and less leading. My role as researcher-interviewer afforded me great flexibility during the interview to use probes and other appropriate questions to elicit responses from participants about their lived experiences. The interview took place a week after establishing contact with the participant. In consultation with the school receptionist, a meeting room located in the administrative block of the school was booked for the conduct

of the interviews. This provided a neutral setting where there were minimum interruptions. At the start of the interview, the participants were reminded of how the information that they provided would be used and were assured of the protection their data. They were also informed of their rights to decline to answer question which they felt were inappropriate and their right to withdraw from the interview if they did not wish to participate further. All students who attended the interview agreed to continue with the interview. However, one student was absent on the day of the interview and I was unable to interview her at a later date. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by me.

4.1.4 Ethical considerations

Data was collected at a school where I had previously taught. On my departure from that school, I had been assured by the head teacher that I could undertake my research there. Nonetheless, on November 13th, 2007, I sought written permission from the head teacher. I was given verbal research approval the following week and received a written consent on February 1st, 2008 (Appendix 5). Full ethical approval was obtained from the Open University Ethics Committee on March 13th, 2008 (Appendix 5). Throughout the data collection, the BERA (Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 2004) as well as the Open University Code of Practice for Research and those Conducting Research (both accessed 21.01.08) were followed. Prior to the interview, I discussed the major principles which would guide the conduct of the research with the participants.

These guides were also detailed in the information booklet provided for participants.

In this study, there were ethical issues involved in obtaining the informed consent of participants without the use of deception. Students were not informed of the basis of their selection. This was justified on the grounds that the harm that would arise from withholding information would be less than the harm involved in informing the participants of the reason why they have been selected. If they were told that they were perceived to be disengaged, this might have further demotivated them, affect their school performance and even their willingness to give truthful information during the research. The harm that could have been involved here seemed to be much greater than any minor infringement of the principle of informed consent involved in not telling them the basis for their selection. Nonetheless, the main components of informed consent were honoured throughout this research.

4.2 Data analysis

4.2.1 Data analysis Procedure

Data analysis was guided by a modified thematic approach which incorporated elements of a narrative methodology. Drawing on the ideas of Braun and Clarke (2006), Pollard (2007) and Lessard et al. (2008), I adopted a two-stage analytic framework which was grounded in the experience of students. The first stage,

which was based on the work of Pollard (2007) and Lessard et al. (2008), focused on the production of narrative cases for each student. Hence, the transcribed interview data were reduced to short descriptive stories for each student which sought to capture the essence of their perspectives and experiences (Appendix 6). Such narrative practices were useful as they made the data more manageable and eased the struggle to identify patterns in the students' stories (Pollard 2007). However, the time frame and scale of the project made it impractical to have the stories validated by the students. The second stage of the process of analysis involved the use of an abridged version of thematic analysis derived from the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) which is shown in Appendix 7. The thematic analysis which proceeded meticulously from the case narratives yielded five significant themes which are explained below.

4.2.2 Analysis of Interview Data

Setting

As an important aspect of ethnographic studies, a discussion of the setting or context provided the background against which the students' perspectives and experiences of disengagement could be understood. While students' interview data revealed relevant background information about themselves, teachers' interviews provided an account of the school, its intake and its catchment area

(see Appendix 8). Throughout the report all proper names of places and people used were pseudonyms.

Pupils' Description

Annette, Elsa, Rachel and Roxanne began their secondary school experience at Redmoor Community High School (RCHS) from Year Seven. By comparison, Marlene and Phyllis entered Redmoor in Year Ten. All the girls except Marlene lived in the school catchment area. Annette lived with her mum, Elsa and her older brother lived with their parents, Phyllis and her older sister lived with their dad, and Marlene lived alone with her boyfriend. Rachel provided no information about her home background.

Annette, Phyllis and Rachel all saw themselves in a positive way. They all said that they were 'outgoing'. In particular, Annette described herself as 'someone who does not take life so seriously' and who tried 'to be open and have fun'. Likewise, Phyllis liked talking to people and making friends. By comparison, both Elsa and Marlene portrayed themselves in a negative way. Elsa described herself as 'dozy, loud, annoying, stubborn, bad, naughty and horrible'. Marlene described herself as 'miserable'; however, when prompted she added that 'I can be a laugh'.

The school's catchment and its intake

RGHS is a mixed 11-16 secondary school located in the West Midlands region of England. Further, RGHS is a non-denominational secondary school whose intake is of predominantly White British background from working class catchments. The school is an open access secondary co-educational school located in a middle class area. However, the majority of students are 'bussed in' from the surrounding rural areas. RGHS was undergoing structural changes under the current leadership. However, in view of the scale of this project, it was not possible to counteract any possible special circumstances that would arise from the use of this single school.

4.2.3 Analysis of Case Narratives

The analysis of the students' narratives revealed five major themes which seemed to be of particular importance. These themes, which included School Life, Social Life, Home Life, Work Life and Other Interesting Life, reflected aspects of the various lived experiences as perceived by the girls. Thus, they provided a rich insight into the interests and preoccupations of young people as well as the extent to which school was important to them.

School life

The girls' experience of school life was analysed in terms of the value they placed on school, their feelings about school and their attitude to learning.

The importance of school

All the girls talked about the importance of school as a place for learning and socialising as well as a means of getting GCSE's to go to college or get a job. For Annette, success at school would allow her to go to university especially since no other family member had done so. Additionally, this would allow her to have enough money to 'afford things'. Elsa also recognised that she could not do without school especially since 'there are people who do not even get a chance to come to school'. For Marlene school 'is alright' and 'good' but 'it depends on the attitude you give when you walk through the doors'. Rachel also believed that 'school is alright' even if 'they teach you a lot of pointless stuff'. Phyllis acknowledged that school 'should be a priority'. She recognised that 'school is good' and that 'it prepares you for everything', 'it makes you realise' and 'it makes you think'.

The account of the value that the girls placed on school is of particular importance. Their recognition of the value of school bears little relation to their feelings about school. A plausible explanation might be that the girls' values may have been shaped by wider societal beliefs about the instrumental values of school. By comparison, their feelings about school might have been constructed

from their daily social interactions at home, school and in society and form part of their character.

Feelings about school

The girls' commitment to school was shown in their general feelings towards the school. In their account Elsa, Phyllis and Rachel all openly showed their dislike for school. Elsa repeatedly acknowledged her lack of commitment to school and voiced her dislike of school when she stated that 'I've never really been very keen into school', 'I'm not into school', 'I've never been into academics' and 'I've never really wanted to come to school from the time I was in little school'. Mr. Pritchard also reasoned that 'school is where she comes before she goes home; the next real part of it is when she gets home'. Likewise, Rachel reported her dislike of school when she stated that 'I don't really like school', 'I don't look forward to coming to school', and 'I just don't like it'. Similarly, Phyllis 'never liked' her 'old school' and her 'primary school'. She consistently reported that 'I do not like school from the time I was little'. She has always wanted to grow up to be an adult. Nonetheless, Phyllis was the only girl who took part in any extra-curricular activities. She also represented the school at sporting events.

Attitude to learning

The girls' commitment to school or lack of it could have affected the way they responded to instructions and how they behaved during lessons. The girls

appeared to display a poor attitude to learning and therefore appeared to be underachieving. The level of involvement in lessons varied for each girl.

Annette liked exciting lessons involving a whole range of activities. If the lessons were not interesting she 'would just have sat there'. Mrs Baird saw Annette as 'one of these girls... that has her own agenda [who] is quite difficult to keep motivated always'. Mr Pritchard noted that Annette 'is just unorganised' and 'can be quite upset sometimes in lessons about things that are going on'. He put her underachievement down to lack of revision, the poor standard of her course work and her inability to 'engage during lessons despite the scaffolding she is receiving'.

Elsa's dislike of school was played out in her lessons. Elsa believed that some lessons were 'a waste of time' and there was no point in doing them since she would never use them. She tried to work most of the time and acknowledged that she was the one 'not really putting her mind to it'. Elsa got bored easily at school; if a lesson was uninteresting she would 'sit and daydream'. She never really did home work because she had 'never really seen the point in doing it'; she believed that 'school is school' and 'home is home'. Mr Pritchard believed that Elsa 'is a concern'. He recounted that 'she never has a book, never has a pen and always turns up late for lessons; she does no revision and is reluctant to produce much work in lessons even though she will try to engage a bit'. Mrs Baird saw Elsa as 'mouth almighty' and 'very immature'. Her account was that Elsa was a 'bright

but downright lazy' girl who 'basically tries to disrupt the class by shouting out all the time'.

Marlene was very concerned about her teachers and their teaching. Marlene reported that 'the teachers do not take time to teach people' and 'can make it difficult'. For example, her History teacher 'talks for ages' and 'you can't keep track of it'; Also, her Graphics teacher 'takes half an hour to come to you and then she shouts at you because you have done no work'. On the contrary, Marlene enjoyed English because the teacher used humour which allowed you to 'probably take in what the teacher is saying and learn from it'. She also liked practical subjects that allowed you to 'do more stuff and see what you are doing'. Marlene reported that she got 'bored' in most of her lessons. Sometimes she walked in and listened to what the teacher was saying. She worked in lessons depending on what mood she was in. If she was 'stressed' 'about things at home or people' then she 'switches off' and 'won't work' and consequently 'won't answer questions'.

Phyllis also found a few of the teachers unfair at times. She liked English, found Geography difficult and struggled in Science. She reported that she started 'messaging about' when she got unfocused in lessons. Nonetheless, she was able to sit down in her room and do some homework at nights. Mrs Baird reported that she saw little of Phyllis who 'has been in and out of school'. She also noted that Phyllis did little work and when she was with Marlene she got no work done. Mr

Pritchard saw Phyllis as 'a thorn in his side', 'a real concern' and someone who 'is not interested the slightest'. He reported that Phyllis 'never has a pen or a book, is very mouthy and rude to staff, wants to chat to her friends during lessons, and is really unhappy when she is made to work'.

Mr. Pritchard reported that Rachel 'sometimes arrives in lessons not really in a frame of mind for it' and that she 'cannot engage' despite the scaffolding given. To Rachel, some lessons like English were 'boring' and she did not need to know about subjects like Chemistry to do hairdressing. Rachel seemed to display a lackadaisical attitude during lessons. She attended most lessons and occupied herself by just doing 'doodles and stuff like that' and she reported that she was not bothered by the teachers. Rachel hated studying and had not done homework for 'ages'. This had been confirmed by both Mrs. Baird and Mr. Pritchard. Mrs. Baird reported that 'it's doing the work at home that's a problem' and Mr. Pritchard noted that 'she simply isn't doing anything at home'.

Change

The interview data revealed that some elements of change were seen in all the girls towards the end of their secondary school journey. Mr. Pritchard believed that both Annette and Rachel were underachieving for a significant period of time in Year 10 and 'they are starting to come around' in Year 11. Rachel had already gotten her Maths at GCSE level and believed that she was 'not going to fail her GCSE's'. Annette herself reported that 'half-way through Year Ten I have grown

up a lot and, looking back, I could have tried harder and should have taken some things more seriously'. As exams were approaching she revised with her friend because she wanted to do well so that she could say that 'she tried'.

Elsa recounted that 'I am not proud of what I was doing'. She documented that 'I had my head down in Year Seven'. Things took a turn for the worse in Year Eight when she became part of the 'wrong crowd' and started 'faffing about'. Elsa reported that as she was in Year 11 she was 'maturing' since she was no longer in the 'wrong crowd'. This contrasted to the views of Mr. Pritchard who believed that Elsa 'still hangs around with the undesirable elements'. Elsa recounted that with the help of her learning mentor she made the change in her behaviour, which resulted in 'just the odd letter being sent home'.

Likewise, Marlene reported that her attitude changed from Year Ten: 'I used to get E's and D's and now I'm getting A's and B's 'in my course work and everything so I think that I've done good'.

Mr Pritchard and Mrs. Baird recognised some element of change in Phyllis. Mr Pritchard reported that Phyllis started to produce some reasonable work which led him to wonder if this was really her work. Mrs Baird also reported that she saw another side to Phyllis 'where she was polite, asked the right questions as if she wanted to work'. Phyllis herself reckoned that 'I wished that I had tried more sometimes and worked hard'. She thought that it was her fault that she had not

done as well as she could of and believed that she would pass a few subjects at GCSE level.

Social life: peer groups and socialising

It was clear from the interview data that all the girls valued their friendship with peers. School was seen as a main site for forging relationship with friends and maintaining constructive friendship ties. However, in one case there was evidence of the negative influence of peers on behaviour at school. Whereas the teachers believed that all the girls associated with students at school who had a negative influence on their learning, the girls themselves perceived their friendship differently.

Annette came to this secondary school because 'mainly that's where all [her] friends from primary school went'. Annette reported that 'if I had no friends it would be horrible' and 'things would have been completely different'. To Annette, 'school is not just a place for learning but also a place to get to meet friends and to develop 'social skills'. Although Annette had school friends, she had closer male friends out of school, whom she found easier to get on with since 'you don't get the bitchiness you get with girls'. A lot of Annette's friends were older than she was and she learned a lot of things from them especially 'stuff about life'. Annette saw her friends most days and went out with them two or three times during the week as well as on Friday and Saturday nights.

It appeared that socialising was very important to Elsa especially since she got 'dead bored easily' in the house. Although she went out with the girls in Year 11, Elsa mainly socialised with girls who had already left school as they were 'a lot more mature'. Elsa appeared to be discreet in her form of socialising. She expressed disgust at teenagers who sat on the street. Rather, socialising took the form of going out and spending time at her mates' house. In particular, they 'pop down to the pub to have a drink' if they were not doing anything, or if they were having a lot of drinks, they went 'round to someone's house'. Although inconsistent in her account, Elsa reported that she went out 'any day really' and that her curfew was at approximately ten thirty at nights.

Elsa's peer group account stood out because she documented the negative influence of the groups that she once associated with. She recounted that her poor behaviour in school had been due in part to her 'being part of the wrong crowd' and 'following people she shouldn't hang around with'. This caused her to start 'faffing about' to the point where she 'didn't even put her head down'. However, she reported that her mates in Year 11 were 'all not dead keen to work [in school] and were all 'fed up of school' because 'they've got to go'. Her friends showed that they 'can't be bothered' with school by 'not coming in' or 'leaving the school premises and not coming back'.

Marlene looked forward to coming to school everyday to see her mates, who helped her to understand the work. She liked going out with her mates and

missed her friends. She had some friends where she lived because she once lived there with her mum. As she had her own home she saw little of her friends; however, she managed to go out with them on Friday nights, when she could.

Phyllis liked seeing her friends at school. She remarked that, 'although school should be a priority I put socialising first'. Phyllis reported that 'I'm friends with loads of people and there is not one person in the year who I dislike'. She saw her friends after school and went out with them on Fridays. She liked going out when she was 'stuck in the house and feeling a bit down'. Her father also liked her going out 'a couple nights a week and encouraged her to do so.

In the exchange with Mr. Pritchard, he reported that Rachel 'doesn't get involved in anything outside of lessons' and 'she is more interested in her social life outside of school'. Rachel herself saw school as a place to meet with her friends. She reported that 'I get on with everyone at school, I just don't care much about the people at school, I speak to them when I choose'. Rachel remarked that after school she and her friends hanged out at her boyfriend's house.

Home life

In four of the cases, there seemed to be a strong attachment to family and home life. Hence, home life might have had an effect on classroom behaviour and concentration on class tasks. The girls talked about having a close rapport with certain family members as a means of obtaining the love, help, support and

motivation, which appeared to be lacking at school. Hence, home relations might have served to boost their confidence and raise their self esteem. Additionally, the home was also the site for the inculcation of important values for the girls. The degree of home bond varied for the girls.

Annette's family meant 'everything' to her. As she got older she developed a relationship with her mum which was 'not an overnight thing'. This relationship helped to instil in her the values of respect, trust and honesty which consequently gained her 'freedom' and 'trust' to do things'. Annette described herself using these qualities which had been built into her character.

Elsa felt 'deep within' that her parents loved her. She recognised the values of 'being independent' and 'saving her money' which her mother had taught her. Elsa believed that she and her mum 'are exactly the same' in that they 'never really liked school'. Elsa reflected on the problems that her behaviour at school has caused her family. She wanted to make her parents proud even if she doubted that she had done so. Her poor behaviour was 'a massive shock to her mum' who thought she 'would turn out like her "really, really quiet" brother'. Additionally, 'falling into the wrong crowds' and 'getting letters home' were 'stressing her mum' and causing 'a lot of upsets with her mum and dad'.

Despite being 'kicked out of her dad's house' and not seeing or having a relationship with her mum, Marlene saw herself as a 'family person'. Although,

she lived with her boyfriend, she kept in close contact with her Nan, her father's mother, who had motivated her to continue her cooking: 'my Nan told me I can be a good cook or chef because I can cook anything'.

Phyllis did not want to 'fall out' with her dad. He had 'motivated her to do a lot of things' like playing football. He ensured that she did not drink the night before a game and ate the right foods for her sports. These instructions remained with Phyllis and became a part of her daily routine. Her dad also allowed her to socialise but kept her from associating with the 'wrong crowd'. Phyllis spent time with her dad by 'staying in some nights and making him some tea'.

Rachel made no reference to her family but acknowledged her boyfriend who she saw most days when she was not at work. After school, she went home to change and spent the rest of her time at his home. She also went out with him on Sunday nights.

In summary, family members were seen as a source of motivation for the girls which might have helped in the construction of their sense of self. Additionally, the girls' preoccupation with family relationships and home life might have been a cause of the decreased attention given to school activities. Hence, home factors might have served to either encourage or prohibit attitudes and behaviours consistent with disengagement.

Work life and other interesting life

The girls showed an interest in other areas of life that appeared to take precedence over school and learning, either wholly or partially. Elsa and Rachel placed priority on their work life, Marlene was committed to her home life, Phyllis' loyalty laid with sports and Annette was highly committed to her friends.

Elsa clearly stated that 'I prefer to work better than school as learning is not my thing'. She held a job as a Kitchen Assistant for approximately six months which she saw as 'not a big job' but 'better than nothing'. She also had another job lined up in a Care Home which she would begin after she completed secondary school. Elsa took the initiative in securing the jobs by 'ringing up'. Having a job allowed her to 'have things now instead of waiting for Christmas', 'to do things on her own and not claim other people's money'. She was of the view that 'if you get your own things and be more independent it is better'.

Rachel's life was centred on her hairdressing career. She had been working in a hairdresser's shop since she was fourteen years old. She worked on Wednesdays to Fridays from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Rachel saw work as a means of getting money and 'getting something to do instead of sitting home all the time doing nothing' and instead of 'being lazy' and getting other people's money. Rachel wanted to go 'straight to work' when she left school. She felt that she was denied the opportunity of pursuing further

training in hairdressing at college and argued that 'instead of school I would have liked to spend my days working'.

Marlene lived in her own home and was highly committed to her home life. She enjoyed cleaning, cooking and keeping the house together 'even if it gets on her nerves'. When her boyfriend went to work at nights she could have done whatever she wanted. However, she spent her nights cooking, cleaning and doing some homework. Marlene's commitment to her home life left her little time to see her friends or to socialise.

Phyllis was strongly committed to the development of her sporting talents and took football 'quite serious'. She went to football training after school and played for the FA. In preparation for her games she heeded her father advice; she also ensured that she was in good physical health by not smoking and being sensible about drinking. Phyllis' passion for sport was shown in her future career move. She wanted to go to college to do Sports Science or wanted to be a Health and Fitness Trainer or a Dietician. In the exchange, she remarked that 'in the meantime I prefer to start working and if I want to go to college I know what I want to do'.

It was interesting to note that the girls' description of their work life and other areas of interest were unprompted accounts which emerged out of the interview and about which they felt at ease talking. This might have

been an indication of their preoccupation with immediate concerns, which might help to explain the decline in their commitment to school life and consequently their apparent disengagement.

4.3 Reflecting on Roxanne's behaviour

I was unable to have an interview with Roxanne and I had little background or school data for her. However, I included her in the analysis because of certain striking qualities identified by her teachers that made her stand out among the other girls. The description of Roxanne as given by Mrs. Baird and Mr. Pritchard was suggestive of negative qualities. Roxanne was depicted as 'a very, very quiet student' suffering from dyslexia. She was 'isolated' within her science group and sat 'on her own by choice'. 'She did not take part in anything' and her 'communication skills' were weak. These qualities were seen to affect her performance and to be responsible for her perceived disengagement. However, Collins (1996) has argued that the child who is 'quiet' at school may not necessarily be so in other social settings and may even be perceived differently. Hence, in light of insufficient information on Roxanne one can only speculate as to whether these perceived qualities were circumstantial: being played out in school only or in other social situations as well.

Another interesting bit of information about Roxanne was that she was absent on the day of the interview, after having been informed of the venue for the interview at the beginning of the week. Roxanne's action raised questions about reasons

for her absence since absenteeism has been cited by writers such as Marks (2000) and Balfanz et al. (2007) as a manifestation of school disengagement. However, one cannot be sure of the true nature of the circumstances surrounding Roxanne's absence. Thus, this points to the limitations of relying solely on one interview as the main data gathering tool especially for ethnographic studies where the aim is to gather information that would help shed light on the participants' social world. In this regard, there is need to use multiple interviews or have triangulated methods as part of the study to gain additional information that would shed light on emerging issues.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA INTERPRETATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the first research question which addresses the information gathered from the narrative-based thematic analysis. It offers some interpretations regarding students' experience of schooling and learning in light of the literature review.

5.2 Discussion

The narrative-based thematic analysis of the interview data revealed the following results about the experiences of disengaged girls:

Most girls showed a strong dislike of school. Their report showed that throughout their school life they saw school as a 'condition for existence', a term used by Brown (1987) to refer to a situation whereby pupils attend school because attendance is compulsory and therefore they must attend often to avoid prosecution. Accordingly, Smyth (2006) argued that for some American students 'euphemistically classified as being disengaged ... 'schooling has become completely banal, meaningless and without purpose, except as a reasonably pleasant place in which to meet and socialise with one's friends' (p. 286). In this

regard, the girls reported that school functioned as a site for socialising and entertaining other peer group activities. Bukowski et al. (1996) highlighted the benefits of such experience when he noted that apart from peer acceptance friendship is seen as one of life's most rewarding interactions which, occurs on a daily basis as a key aspect of the social and emotional development of children and adolescents.

The girls showed a strong commitment to their peer group even though they appeared to make independent choices in their lives regarding their learning and future careers. The literature supported the link between peer group and learning. For example, Black (2006) documented that students who are engaged feel accepted by their peers. Further, Pollard and Filer (2005) noted that a pupil's learner identity was shaped by peer group influences. My findings showed that only one student reported the impact of negative peer influence on her learning which may have been due to the small number of cases I studied. Additionally, my research focus did not allow me to explore this issue. Nonetheless, this discovery may well inform about the range of ways in which students respond to learning and their school.

The analysis also showed that the girls' identity construction was influenced in part by their relationships with particular family members as well as other home experiences. Hence, family relationships affected the girls' interests and preoccupations, and family values became engrained in them to the extent that

as they constructed their identity they drew upon these aspects of their home socialisation. Such home influences were cited by Pollard and Filer (2005) as an important aspect of the construction of pupils' learner and self identity which enabled them to cope with their circumstances.

Apart from home influence, the girls' class and ethnic status may have shaped their disengagement attitudes and behaviours. The girls were all of White British background and were seen by their teachers to be from working class communities. Research has shown that in the UK, White British pupils have the highest rate of underachievement of all the ethnic groups (McIntosh and Houghton, 2005) and that among nine European countries including England, home background and area of residence were seen to be key influences on disengagement (Kendall and Kinder, 2005). Research by Pollard and Filer (2005) also confirmed how pupils' sense of themselves and their lives were shaped and reshaped by experiences in the home, school and community and in relationship with their home, school and peers. These social influences can either facilitate or hinder an individual's commitment to school and learning. However, in view of inadequate information on the socioeconomic status of the girls, judgements made about such claims would have to be suspended. Rather, further research would have to be conducted to explore the effects of ecological and socioeconomic factors on students' decision to disengage.

The findings showed that the girls talked about accepting some of the classroom and school norms but that they exhibited behaviours consistent with behavioural,

cognitive and emotional disengagement. For example, although some girls accepted school rules regarding punctuality and attendance, they ignored classroom rules about being equipped and prepared for lesson and completing home work tasks. These behaviours have been identified by Smyth (2006) and Balfanz et al. (2007) as elements of a wide spectrum of disengagement, which Black (2006) saw to be prevalent in every OECD country. Furthermore, some girls demonstrated what I referred to as 'contextualised educational disengagement' where they were committed to learning in particular lessons; they strategically chose which lessons to display behaviours consistent with disengagement. Other girls appeared to be disengaged in most lessons and from the institution of school itself.

The girls talked about making the decision to disengage as a behaviour option. They also talked about how they showed signs of actively disengaging from school and/ or classroom learning. In this sense at least, disengagement was seen as a choice rather than a state influenced by circumstances or factors over which they have little or no control. Additionally, the findings revealed that even though the girls appeared to be disengaging from school or learning they appeared to be highly 'engaged' in other activities. They were committed to other activities which they placed as a priority, as these interests appeared to them to be more important than school.

The literature both in the US and the UK clearly revealed the importance of other interests in the lives of those judged to be disengaged. Writers such as Steinberg (1996), Rudduck and Flutter (2000), Dwyer and Wynn (2001), Fredricks et al. (2004) Smyth (2006) and Lessard et al. (2008) all highlighted the attention that students give to non-school interests as they seek to create their own identity. Hence, young people may dedicate more time and effort to other activities with the corollary that school might no longer be a priority. In this regard, the girls' choice of learning strategy and career path was impacted upon by non- school 'situated learning' experiences (see Lave and Wagner, 1991).

The students' response also showed that the decision to disengage could take place at any phase of the compulsory school years and, for some students the process intensified during the secondary school years. This result was consistent with the findings of Black (2006) which showed that in OECD countries disengagement was particularly evident in the crucial middle years of school where schooling experiences are at odds with the experiences of adolescence. However, an interesting discovery was that the girls completed their secondary schooling which was contrary to the findings presented by Smyth (2006) and Lessard et al. (2008). They both saw disengagement from schools in Canada and the USA as part of a process which ultimately ended in school dropout. One plausible explanation for this inconsistency may be that in the UK, there are greater sanctions attached to defiance of the formal school norms which work to prohibit actions such as absenteeism and truancy by students. Consequently,

stricter measures have been put in place to deal with the norms relating to attendance and punctuality. This evidence has been confirmed by Broadhurst et al. (2005) who cited punitive interventions such as parenting orders and prosecution as compelling forces to comply with attendance policies. It may also be that some pupils are excluded at an earlier age and pupils who are still in school by the age of fifteen are more likely to stay. Conversely, it can be argued that there was no indication of the extent of exclusion or absenteeism in the UK and perhaps not all cases may be reported on records such as Missing Children Register and Out of School Register in the UK.

All the girls talked about school in instrumental terms as a means of advancing their academic or vocational careers. The girls also talked about making changes in their behaviour as they approached the end of their secondary school year with some accepting the blame for their academic performance and attitude to learning. This resonated with the work of Pollard and Filer (2005) who acknowledged the important changes made by students in their approach to learning as GCSE was imminent. Pollard and Filer (2005) also found that students strategically targeted their efforts towards subjects perceived to be of relevance to their future career aspirations. However, in this research, there did not appear to be evidence to show that, for all students, their strategic efforts were geared towards subjects relevant to their future career aspirations. Rather, it appeared that the girls wanted something to show that they were not the under-performers that they have been demonstrating during their time at secondary

school and that they were capable of doing well. For four of these girls, their planned future career did not appear to depend on their GCSE grades. The exception to this was Annette who wanted to move on to college and university. It would be interesting to follow the career paths of the girls to document any changes made in their choices.

It may be significant that most girls identified career moves which were practically or vocationally based, were in keeping with their dominant interests, and for which training was lacking or denied. This finding was quite interesting in view of the fact that UK and European based studies have focused attention on programmes such as alternative educational initiatives, GVNQ and vocational GCSE as a means of tackling disengagement. These initiatives have been undertaken in view of evidence which pointed to the perceived irrelevance of the curriculum in the lives of many young students (Steedman and Stoney, 2004; Kendall and Kinder, 2005). In this regard, Kendall and Kinder (2005) noted that a common influence on disengagement in the UK is the fact that vocational education does not have parity of esteem with academic qualifications. Hence, the division between vocational and academic education often results in student being given courses that are inappropriate for meeting their learning needs. As such, they called for a revision of the curriculum and the offer of alternative curriculum (including accreditation) to match individual learning styles and make it more relevant to the needs of disengaged students. However, some concern has been raised about the reliance on vocational education. Kendall and Kinder

(2005) noted that there is the need to avoid falling into the trap of seeing vocational education as the solution to disengagement, as is believed to be the case in England. Additionally, I believe that provisions which target 'the group who can benefit the most' (Steedman and Stoney, 2004) are discriminatory and as such may not reach some of the disengaged students who need them.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the main findings relating to the first research question. It also considers the second research question which addresses the effectiveness of interviews in conducting ethnographic research along with some methodological issues arising from the research. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the research as well as the implications for future research.

6.2 Summary of Findings

A thematic analysis of the girls' narratives suggested that disengagement might have been a deliberate choice taken to cope with circumstances in their lives. The girls drew upon home, school and peer group relationships and experiences to make sense of their lives. Most girls seemed to be preoccupied with other interests relating to their planned future career, which appeared to be a priority for most of them. Hence, school appeared to have less relevance in their lives.

The girls saw school in instrumental terms as a site for socialising and peer group activities, and as a means of advancing their future careers. Nonetheless,

investing in education did not appear to be of immediate personal and economic benefit to most of them. Hence, their disengagement seemed to be 'contextualised' where they were unwilling to engage in particular lessons. Nonetheless, the girls reported changes made in their behaviour towards the end of their secondary school journey.

6.3 Methodological issues

Given the time frame and scope of the research, the semi-structured interview proved to be effective in gathering data that were grounded in the experiences of the students. Additionally, the use of individual interviews was useful in capturing the personal views of students, which would have probably been lost if focused group discussions or group interviews were used. The use of thematic analysis was effective in eliciting rich insights into the lives of the student. Theoretically, the thematic analysis supported the use of the interactionist ethnographic approach to explore the nature of disengagement since it permitted the examination of the resources that students drew on in their relationships with others to make sense of their lives. Hence, in keeping with an ethnographic tradition, it should be recommended as a foundation for future research on disengagement.

The conduct of this school-based research was a stressful experience which necessitated working around the tight administrative and teaching schedules,

especially since it was unfeasible to carry out fieldwork after school. This required negotiating and renegotiating access with teachers and students in an effort to set up the interviews. During my fieldwork, I encountered a situation where the interviews with two teachers and a student had to be rushed because of their other commitments. Such a situation could result in loss of potentially vital data. The above issues also raise concern about the physical and mental preparation needed for conducting ethnographic research in busy places like schools which Ball (2003) addressed as part of developing and maintaining the 'skilful self' of the researcher.

An ethical issue that arose during the research was that I was approached by a student who questioned why the chosen participants were all 'lazy' students. I gave what I thought was a satisfactory answer by informing her that I was interested in students' views about their experience at school and by making the effort to approach me was a means of ensuring that she was comfortable to participate in the project. In light of this emerging issue, at the start of the interviews all participants were reminded of their rights to withdraw from the project or decline to answer questions that they are uncomfortable with and were reassured of the protection of the information they would provide.

6.4 Limitation of research and implications for further research

This research sought to explore the issue of disengagement within a single school of predominantly white British background, in working class communities, based on interviews held with five girls. Hence, in view of the nature and size of the sample, the findings cannot be generalised to other schools. Additionally, given that this research narrowly focused on the disengagement among White British girls of working class background, future research should consider how the discourses of class and ethnicity impact on students' learning and disengagement. In this regard, the sample should incorporate more ethnically diverse schools drawn from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

One of the drawbacks to this research was that in view of some inconsistencies in some of the students' responses it was not possible to for me validate the participants' responses, as suggested by Ball (2003), due to time constraints. Hence, for future research it is recommended that the data be strengthened by the use of multiple interviews with students to clarify information given. Additionally, there is need for the corroboration of evidence gathered from other sources such as observations and documentary evidence to validate students' views.

The thematic analysis revealed behaviours which were suggestive of the complex nature of disengagement. However, in light of the scale of the project it was not

possible to construct a typology of disengagement. Hence, as a research path, it would be desirable to increase the sample size and incorporate more schools from different communities in order to capture the varieties in forms of disengagement in schools. This would serve as a basis for constructing a typology that would identify nuances of disengagement, thereby elucidating the multi dimensional nature of this process.

The research findings also suggested the influence of other non-school interests in the lives of the girls. However, this research did not considered the broader social factors and other influences that students draw upon to make sense of their schooling experiences as part of the wider construction of their self identity. Consequently, another research pursuit would be to explore the impact of sociocultural influences on students' disengagement choices. This would necessitate a consideration of the views of other significant persons in their life, such as friends, parents, and teachers, to gain a more complete insight into their schooling experiences and disengagement tendencies.

In view of the concerns raised over the conduct of educational ethnographies, future research should consider the pursuant of ethnographic work in schools that are located in a geographic region like the Caribbean, where there might be relatively fewer issues with gaining research approval and negotiating access to schools. I believe that such research is overdue in view of the fact that there

appears to be no known published research on disengagement in Caribbean schools.

6.5 Conclusion

This study has explored the schooling experiences of a small sample of girls aged 15-16 years judged by their teacher to be disengaged. The literature review and findings attested to the complex nature of disengagement. Given the scale of the study, it was not possible to identify a distinct typology of forms of disengagement and further study is warranted to elucidate the extent of disengagement. Hence, consideration should be given to the conduct of further explorative research to unravel the complexity of disengagement. Further, as a research alternative, consideration should be given to the conduct of ethnographic pilot research in the Caribbean region to shed light on the issue of disengagement.

The use of semi-structured interviews was successful in obtaining rich insights into the lived experiences of the girls. Hence, the research findings support the use of semi-structured interviews and narrative-based thematic analysis as a platform for future ethnographic research within an interactionist tradition. However, consideration needs to be given to the use of triangulated methods to increase the validity of research findings and to provide richer research insights. There is also the need to examine individual agency against the backdrop of other social, economic and structural factors as a further research initiative.

REFERENCES

- Archer, L., Halsall, A. and Hollingworth, S. (2007) Class, Gender, (Hetero) sexuality and Schooling: Paradoxes Within Working-class Girls' Engagement with Education and Post-16 Aspirations, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol 28, no. 2, pp. 165 - 180.
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Razavieh, A. and Sorensen, C. (2006) *Introduction to research in education*, Belmont, CA, Thomson/Wadsworth.
- Balfanz, R., Herzog, L. and Mac Iver, D. J. (2007) Preventing student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle-grades schools: Early identification and effective interventions, *Educational Psychologist*, vol 42, no. 4, pp. 223-235.
- Ball, S. J. (2003) 'Self doubt and Soft data: social and technical trajectories in ethnographic research' in Hammersley, M. (ed.) *Educational Research: Current Issues*, London, Sage/ Open University Press.
- BERA (2004) *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, available online at: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/pdfs/ETHICA1.PDF> (accessed 21 January, 2008).
- Black, R. (2006) *Overcoming Disadvantage through the Engaging Classroom*, Melbourne, Australia, The R. E. Ross Trust/ Education Foundation.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol 3, no. 2, pp. 77 - 101.
- Broadhurst, K., Paton, H. and May-Chahal, C. (2005) 'Children missing from school systems: exploring divergent patterns of disengagement in the narrative accounts of parents, carers, children and young people', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol 26, no. 1, pp. 105 - 119.
- Brown, P. (1987) *Schooling Ordinary Kids: Inequality, Unemployment, and the New Vocationalism*, London, Tavistock.
- Bukowski, W. M., Newcomb, A. F. and Hartup, W. W. (1996) *The Company They Keep: Friendship in Childhood and Adolescence*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Code of Practice for Research and Those Conducting Research available online at: <http://www.open.ac.uk/research> (accessed 21 January, 2008).
- Coleman, J. S. (1985) *Becoming Adult in a Changing Society*, Paris, OECD.

Collins, J. (1996) *The Quiet Child*, London, Cassell.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) *14-19 Education and Skills: 14-16 Re-engagement Programme* available online at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?sid=40andpid326andlid=292andctype=Textandpt> (accessed 9 October, 2007).

Dwyer, P. and Wynn, J. (2001) *Youth, Education and Risk: Facing the Future*, London, Routledge.

Finn, J. D. and Rock, D. A. (1997) 'Academic success among students at risk for school failure', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol 82, no. 2, pp. 221 - 234.

Fredricks, J. A., Blumefeld, P. C. and Paris, A. H. (2004) 'School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence', *Review of Educational Research*, vol 74, no. 1, pp. 59-109.

Gaskell, G. (2000) 'Individual and Group Interviewing' in Bauer, M. W. and Gaskell, G. (eds.) *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*, London, Sage.

Hammersley, M. (ed.) (1999) *Researching School Experience: Ethnographic Studies of Teaching and Learning*, London, Falmer Press.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (2007) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, London, Routledge.

Hammersley, M. and Gomm, R. (2005) 'Recent radical criticism of the interview in qualitative inquiry' in Holborn, M. and Haralambos, M. (eds.) *Developments in Sociology*, Edinburg, Pearson Education.

Kendall, S. and Kinder, K. (2005) *Reclaiming Those Disengaged from Education and Learning: a European Perspective* Slough, NFER.

Kvale, S. (1996) *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, London, Sage.

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Lessard, A., Butler-Kisber, L., Fortin, L., Marcotte, D., Potvin, P. and Royer, E. (2008) 'Shades of disengagement: High school dropouts speak out', *Social Psychology of Education*, vol 11, no. 1, pp. 25 - 42.

Libbey, H. P. (2004) 'Measuring student relationships to school: Attachment, Bonding, Connectedness, and Engagement', *Journal of School Health*, vol 74, no. 7, pp. 274-283.

Marks, H. M. (2000) 'Student engagement in instructional activity: patterns in the elementary, middle, and high school years', *American Educational Research Journal*, vol 37, no. 1, pp. 153-184.

McIntosh, S. and Houghton, N. (2005) *Disengagement from Secondary Education: A story Retold*, London, Learning and Skills Development Agency.

McMillan, G. (2003) 'Is no child left behind in wise schooling for African American male students?', *The High School Journal*, vol 87, no.2, pp. 25 -33.

Pollard, A. (2007) 'The Identity and Learning Programme: 'principled pragmatism' in a 12-year longitudinal ethnography', *Ethnography and Education*, vol 2, no.1, pp. 1 - 19.

Pollard, A. and Filer, A. (1999) 'Learning, policy and pupil careers: Issues from a longitudinal ethnography', in Hammersley, M. (ed.) *Researching School Experience: Ethnographic Studies of Teaching and Learning*, London, Falmer Press.

Pollard, A. and Filer, A. (2005). *Learning Differentiation and Strategic Action in Secondary Education: Analyses from the Identity and Learning Programme*, TLPP Annual Conference, Warwick, TLRP.

Rathbone/Nuffield 14-19 Review (2007) 'Engaging Youth Enquiry', Manchester, Rathbone available online at: [http://www.rathboneuk.org/press_release.aspx? ID=184](http://www.rathboneuk.org/press_release.aspx?ID=184) (accessed 9 October 2007).

Rudduck, J. and Flutter, J. (2000) 'Pupil participation and pupil perspective: 'carving a new order of experience' *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol 30, no.1, pp. 75-89.

Seale, C. (1998) 'Qualitative interviewing' in Seale, C. (ed.) *Researching Society and Culture*, London, Sage.

Smyth, J. (2006) 'When students have power: student engagement, student voice, and the possibilities for school reform around 'dropping out' of school', *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, vol 9, no.4, pp. 285 - 298.

Steedman, H. and Stoney, S. (2004) 'Disengagement 14-16: Context and Evidence', London, CEP available online at: [http://cep.lse.ac.uk/_new/publications/year.asp? pubyear=2004](http://cep.lse.ac.uk/_new/publications/year.asp?pubyear=2004) (accessed 9 October 2007).

Steinberg, L. (1996) *Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform Has Changed and What Parents Need To Do*, New York, Simon and Schuster.

Taylor, S. (2006) *Ethnographic Research: A Reader*, London: Sage/Open University Press

Williams, R. and Pritchard, C. (2006) *Breaking the Cycle of Educational Alienation: A Multi-professional Approach*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.

WORD COUNT: 16349

Appendix 1

Dimensions of Disengagement

Identifying behavioural disengagement: non-participation in academic and non academic activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- defiance of rules- skipping school- not obeying classroom rules- lack of effort or expending low effort (simply not doing the work)- lack of persistence, concentration, attention- not asking questions, not contribution to class discussion- non-participation in school-related or extra-curricular activities such as athletics or school council
Identifying emotional disengagement: affective reactions in the classroom to the school and the teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- lacking a sense of belonging or a feeling of being important to the school- lacking a sense of attainment value non-appreciation of success, that is, doing well on the task- negative feelings towards the school: – disliking the school, the teacher or the work- feeling sad in the school- being bored or uninterested in the work
Identifying cognitive disengagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Lack of self regulation- Not being strategic- No preference for hard work- Little or no effort directed at learning, understanding or mastering knowledge- Not valuing learning- Non use of learning strategies to remember, organise and understand the material- Inability to suppress distractions- Lack of intrinsic motivation- Not trying to understand something that is challenging

Evidence of different dimensions of disengagement based on the work of Fredricks et al. (2004)

Appendix 2

Interview Schedules

Teachers' interview schedule

Introduction: Welcome informant

Reminder of ethical standards to be followed (confidentiality, data protection, withdrawal rights, use of information, etc)

List of possible questions/ issues to be raised

1 Name, role in school, professional history e.g.:

How long have you been teaching at the school?

Tell me about your professional history and your role in this school

2 Description of the school, catchment area and intake e.g.:

Can you tell me a little about the school and its catchment area as well as the student intake?

3 Description of students that are taught e.g.:

How many of the Year 11 students do you teach? How are they organised? Which group do you find easiest to teach? Which group is opposite to this group? Can you tell me about the girls in these two contrasting groups?

Teachers are given a paper to write down the class list as they talk about the girls in each group. Descriptions should be about anything that they find significant about the girls, that is worth mentioning: this can include attitude, behaviour, performance, achievement, successes, personalities, appearance, family background, ability, aptitude (prompts given to draw out descriptions, or talk about students not mentioned (I have copies of the class list for the particular subjects)

4 Questions from informant

Do you have any questions for me or are there anything I should have asked and have not?

Conclusion: Pause to allow informant to make any additional comments

Thank informant

Students' interview schedule

Introduction: Welcome informant

Brief reminder of ethical standards to be followed (confidentiality, data protection, withdrawal rights, use of data, etc)

List of possible questions/ issues to be raised

- 1 How would you describe yourself to somebody? - (a friend or perhaps someone in a chat room).
- 2 How long have you been at this school and why did you choose to come to this school rather than another one?
- 3 Tell me about your feelings towards school. What does coming to school mean to you? Tell me about your experiences of school.
- 4 Tell me about your lessons. How do you find your lessons generally? How do you feel about the way you are learning in your lessons? Tell about a lesson that you enjoy. Tell me what you do during a normal lesson? How do you prepare for your lessons at home?

- 5 Tell me about other things that you enjoy doing besides coming to school.
Do you take part in after school or other extra-curricular activities? How
do you spend your afternoons/evenings after school?
- 6 What do you want to do after you leave school? Do you think that school
prepares you for your future career?
- 7 Is there any one you see as a source of motivation in your life? As a young
person, is there a certain way of life that you would like to be living? Tell
me about your social life.
- 8 Questions from informant

Is there anything that you would like to ask me or that you want to add?

Conclusion: Pause to allow informant to make any additional comments

Thank informant

Appendix 3

Excerpts from Transcribed Interviews

Excerpts from teachers' interview

In these excerpts the teachers talk about the school, its catchment area and its intake. **Researcher's questions are in bold font.**

Science Teacher: Mr. Pritchard

- Do you want me to say something about the nature of the school?

Sure. Especially if you can contrast the time you came in with the nature of the school now

- Sure (laughs) When I came here it was like Beirut; it really was very, very rough and I was the first person appointed by the head teacher then, in 1995. And, he took the school through a very, very quick change. He really hit the ground: one, he was very visible and he introduced a lot more structure to the school and a lot stricter discipline so that by the time 1998,

1999 came around, the school was a completely different place and as a result it changed its name fromto

So what can you say about the kinds of students who come to this school now and how would you contrast them with the nature of those who came before when you entered?

- Well to be honest the nature of the pupils has not changed that much in the 13 years I've been here. We are sited on a fairly middle class housing estate and we get very few people from the housing estate. We might a handful each year, in each cohort. The rest of our cohort tends to be bussed in from oror area.

So is the catchment a middle class area?

- I would, em, parts of it are, parts of it aren't and parts.... I would say if you look at our free school meals ratio, it would suggest that we tend to have quite a significant proportion of em deprived households here as well. And err; we tend to have the complete batch. We have very, very able kids and em, we also have kids who have quite significant special needs, quite a lot going on at home to be honest em you just have to look around the school and see some of the kids who come in late. I don' t want to mention names, but there are a lot of lads and girls you can see who have a lot going on outside school. I can remember four years ago I had a lad in my form who seems very down in the dumps, I say come on what's up with

you, are you feeling okay today.....had a call for burglary at night and I say ah, he had broke into a house.....We have several pupils like those, who have, I get the impression that they have free reign when they get home basically.

RE Teacher: Mrs. Baird

So how would you describe the catchment area?

- The catchment of the school is, and area so even though the school is situated in quite an affluent area the majority, almost three quarters do not come from the surrounding area of the school, they come from the outskirts of the town ,we do have a lot of pupils from socially deprived areas

How would you compare these groups of students to those who were there when you came in?

- The students are more or less the same because as the years have gone on the housing estate around the school where we did have youngsters coming in they are the new young generation the families have moved out. Apparently before I came here we used to have pupils bussed in as far as MD....., L....., not MD.....,L, M So the area was much bigger we used to have three or four double-decker buses so the children when I came in , now we've got three single-decker buses and they're not even

full to capacity so it has been a big change over the years and the type of child that come to the school

Year 11 Form Tutor: Mr. Douglas

How would you describe this school and its catchment area? Can you compare it to the school you taught at previously?

- This school is in direct contrast to the school where I taught at previously: A five star A-C GCSE figure of 78% whereas here is 30%. Quite a big difference in terms of performance; In terms of catchment area, there is a fairly high proportion of rented housing, council housing. In my previous school it was more private housing in a middle class area. The aspirations are different as well a lot of the pupils here have got very low aspirations and expectations. In previous school quite a lot of single parent families in this school I am not sure what the population is for e.g. in the Year 11 engineering class the only two trouble makers in the class are from single parent families.

Excerpts from students' interview

In these excerpts the students talk about interests that are particularly important to them.

Researcher's questions are in bold font.

Annette: Socialising

What do you think of your lessons?

- A lot of the teachers were really, really good and I don't know it's like it's not just a place for learning it's also a place where you get to meet friends. My friends are very important to me and if I had no friends it would be horrible

When do you get to see your friends?

- Some of them are in my lessons, some of them aren't. I have many friends but I have closer friends like I've got a lot of male friends out of school because I find it easier to get on with them a lot of the times because most of the time with lads you do not get the bitchiness you get with girls

What do your friends think of school?

- Most of the friends I lime with they can't see the point cause one of me friends have already got a job. One of them I lime with works at _____ and wants to be a hairdresser; so she can't really see the point in her being here cause if she wasn't here she would have been working

Is there any thing apart from going to lessons that you do or any other activities that you do out of school?

- I see my friends most days

How often do you go out?

- Two or three times during the week then Friday and Saturday Friday nights and Saturday nights I go out with my friends

How important is socialising to you?

- It's really important to me. I've got a lot of friends who are a lot older than me so I find that I learn a lot of things from being out with my friends. Although you learn different thing about maths, science or English on your own but when you are with your friends you learn stuff about life

Elsa: Work

If you do not perform well at school will your mum help you in any way?

- Oh yeah but I've had a job for about six months now so well I haven't got it any more I used to have it about two weeks ago

Was it a care job?

- No Kitchen Assistant

How did you get it?

- I rang up I rang up well I thought it was my last year so I justit was not a big job but it was better than nothing I've always preferred to work better than school I know

Did you save the money?

- God no, I haven't got any I left the job two weeks ago but I've got 72 quid in my bank It takes ten days for you to get paid and can't wait to get the money in my bank. I had 300 quid and it was all gone in two weeks

Will you go to college straight away after you leave school?

- Em, I've always wanted to get a job first because if I'm not if I don't like school then I don't think I'd really like college I just don't think that learning is my thing you know what I mean yeah so I've always like working I've loved it up there with the old people so

- I like work better than school I love my money mum is going mad I spent £300 in two week. Mum doesn't give me pocket money because I've got a job

You said that you left it two weeks ago?

- Yes but I've got one when I'm sixteen I had one lined up for when I'm sixteen in August I have to do a trial week in august and then start my mum always wanted me to do things on my own. My friend's twenty and she got fed up of the dole it is claiming other people's money; 'if you get your own things and be more independent it is better for example if you want a phone you can go to buy it and not have to wait until Christmas or so'.

What is the upcoming job about?

- Care work; it's in an old people's home

Phyllis: Sports

How would you describe yourself to someone?

- I'd say that I've got a lot of hobbies, I like doing sports em I like talking to people I like making friends. I like doing a lot of things I am an outgoing person I do athletics as well, running I do marathon runs.

What do you do on an afternoon after school when you go home?

- Em I go football training and basically see my friends after school. I go for training twice in the week and I play at the weekend again- Saturday. I go with friends on a Friday. I don't always go out every night. I like staying in some nights and making me dad some tea. Dad has no problem he likes me going out a couple nights a week and encourages me to do it. I have a good relationship with my dad.

What do you want to do when you leave school?

- I want to go to college to do Sport Science and I want to train to be a Health and Fitness Trainer and a Dietician.

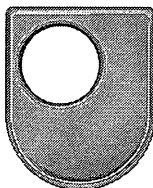
Who do you see as a source of motivation?

- Well my dad motivates me a lot to do things like football it has kept me from associating with the wrong people and going out and drinking, the night before a game I stay in and eat the right foods. I do not drink or

smoke. I can't smoke. Now and again I will have a drink or something but I am quite sensible when it comes to things like that cause its football and it's quite serious what I am doing. For football you get drugs test. I'm playing in the FA quite an important league. I've just recently had my first game in the women's team as a reserve. Someone comes to the football game and gives you all the drug test they don't tell you they're coming they just come out of the blue like that

What do you think of that?

- Well you shouldn't take drugs it's against the law and if you've had any drugs then you'll get caught eventually



The Open University

**Faculty of Education and
Language Studies**

The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA
United Kingdom

Tel +44 (0) 1908 274 066
www.open.ac.uk

_____ 2008

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am Mrs. Uthel Laurent, a research student at the Open University, whose previous career was as a teacher in the local area. I am presently conducting an investigation into the learning experiences of students. Your child has been selected to participate in this project. Please find enclosed an information booklet which will detail the purpose and nature of the research as well as explaining how the information collected about your child will be used and handled.

Please indicate whether you are prepared to allow your child to participate in the project by signing in the consent form provided. Forms should be returned to the school's main office at the end of the week. Unless the form is returned, your child will not be able to participate in the project.

Should you have any further queries about the project do not hesitate to contact me using the contact details outlined in the information booklet provided.

Thank you for your anticipated support in this project.

Yours sincerely

Uthel Laurent
Research Student

Child and Youth Studies Group
Tel +44 (0) 1908 332 425
u.laurent@open.ac.uk

Uthel Laurent

CONSENT FORM

I (**Name of student**) agree to take part in the research project. I have had the purpose of the research explained to me. I have been informed that I may refuse to participate by simply saying so or by filling in a withdrawal form which should be handed at the main office in a sealed envelope. I have been assured that my confidentiality will be protected as explained in the booklet and letter. The researcher has explained to me about data protection. I agree that the information that I provide can be used for educational or research purposes including publication. I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact (**Name of Researcher**) at (**Mobile or E mail**). If I want to talk to someone else about the project, I can contact the researcher's supervisor (**Name of Supervisor**) at (**Telephone or E mail**).

.....

I..... (**Name of Parent/Guardian**) agree to allow my daughter to take part in the research project. I have been given information about the aim and purpose of the research. I have been informed that my daughter may refuse to participate by simply saying so or by completing a withdrawal form which should be handed in at the main office in a sealed envelope. I have been assured that my daughter's confidentiality will be protected as well as how information collected will be used and protected as explained and specified in the booklet and letter. I agree that information that my daughter provides can be used for educational or research purposes including publication. I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact (**Name of Researcher**) at (**Mobile or E mail**). If I want to talk to someone else about the project, I can contact the researcher's supervisor (**Name of Supervisor**) at (**Telephone or E mail**).

School's Approval

1ST February 2008

Dear Uthel

Many thanks for your kind letter and I am glad to hear that things are going well and to read about your studies.

I would be delighted to offer you the opportunity to undertake your research at _____ and look forward to working alongside you again.

I trust that your family is well and that you will be in touch with me soon to make arrangements for your research.

Yours

HEADTEACHER

Ethics Committee's Approval



MEMORANDUM

HUMAN PARTICIPANTS AND MATERIALS ETHICS COMMITTEE

FROM: John Oates, Chair, HPMEC **Email:** j.m.oates@open.ac.uk
To: Uthel Laurent (MRes student) PLAC **TEL:** 52395
CC: **DATE:** 6 March 2008
SUBJECT: **Ethics application:** Exploring Educational Engagement: How do the cultural practices that girls engage in help in understanding their educational engagement and achievement? **Ref:** HPMEC/08/#398/1

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted on 28th February 2008, is approved by the Open University Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee, subject to satisfactory responses to the following:

You are asked to:

1. Remove/replace the image on the front of the information leaflet. It is considered by the scrutiny panel to be an inappropriate representation for your study
2. Consider whether potential participants should be given information about how they have been selected for approach and justify your decision, giving a good case for withholding this information if that is what you decide

At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

John Oates
Chair, OU HPMEC

From: J.M.Oates
Sent: 13 March 2008 10:41
To: U.Laurent
Subject: RE: Ethics application #398

Dear Uthel Laurent,

Thank you for these revised documents.
I have reviewed them and can confirm that they satisfactorily address the recommendations of the scrutiny panel.
This completes the ethics approval for your project.

I hope that the research goes well.

John Oates
Chair, HPMEC

-----Original Message-----

From: U.Laurent [mailto:U.Laurent@open.ac.uk]
Sent: 10 March 2008 16:41
To: J.M.Oates
Subject: RE: Ethics application #398

Dear Mr. Oates,

Thank you for your email acknowledging tentative ethical approval of my research. Please find attached the relevant documents which have been reviewed and amended to reflect the recommendations given as follows:

- a) The image at front of booklet has been excluded
- b) The ethic form has been amended under the sub headings of Recruitment procedures and Deception

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Uthel Laurent

Appendix 6

Case Narratives of Students

Annette's Story

Annette describes herself as a 16 year old who is 'quite outgoing', 'quite an honest person', 'quite loud', 'someone who does not take life so seriously and who tries to be open and have fun'. Annette spent five years at this school. Her main reason for coming to school is because 'that is where all my friends from primary school went and because it was the closest school for me'.

Annette reports that 'her family mean every thing to her'. She lives alone with her mum. Annette reports that her mum gives her a lot of freedom. She feels that if she shows her mum that respect her mum will show her back respect and let her do things. Her view is that 'if I am honest with her she can trust me to do things'. Annette recounts that it took her a long time to build this level of trust with her mum and that 'it was not an overnight thing'. Since it is only the two of them in the house, things could 'get heated up' and 'out of hand'. Annette reports that 'it is only as I have gotten older, me and me mum have started getting on'. Annette reported that she has resorted to telling her mum the truth which is easier than to 'run into' her because 'my mum is "a psychic", she knows everything by just looking at you'.

From the interview response it appears that Annette's life gravitates around her friends. Annette stress that her friends are 'very important' to her and like her family they mean everything to her. She has found it easy to make friends and try to be open and have fun because 'it makes it easier'. She is of the view that 'school is not just a place for learning but also a place to get to meet friends and it is important for your social skills to learn how to deal with other people: 'if you don't know how to deal you will not be successful at your job'. She reports that 'if I had no friends it would be "horrible" and things would have been completely different'. Annette recalls that she has many friends. Some of her friends are in her lessons but she has closer male friends that are out of school. A lot of the time she finds it easier to get on with the lads since 'you don't get the bitchiness you get with girls'. Annette reports that she has gotten a lot of friends older than her and she learns 'a lot of things' from being out with her friends: 'when you are with your friends you learn stuff about life'. Annette sees her friends most days. She goes out two or three times during the week and on Friday and Saturday nights.

Annette is in the top set for most of her lessons. She reports that 'a lot of the teaching is really, really good'. Some days they cover loads in lesson and other days they don't 'because other people in the top set are talking'. Annette reports that she likes exciting lessons with a whole range of activities and chooses subjects that interest her even if her teachers want her to do otherwise. Annette reports that she finds RE, English, English Literature and Psychology interesting.

She wanted to be a lawyer 'years and years ago' but now she does not know what she wants to do. She is now thinking of 'doing something to do with Psychology or Law in university'.

Annette reports that if the lesson is not interesting she would 'just have sat there'. However she gives an account of her maths experience for two and a half years with substitute teachers, which she claims has affected her school performance and caused her to get a D on a Foundation paper. Annette reports that she doesn't really get to do a lot at home and she does not get to do her home work.

Mr. Pritchard sees Annette as an 'unorganised' student. He reports that 'she can be quite upset sometimes in lessons about things that are going on and she can sometimes not really be with you in the class'. He also states that she and Rachel tend to circulate in peer groups known to engage in negative behaviours. According to Mr. Pritchard, Annette is a very able young lady who 'could walk through' her exams and who should be able to get a grade B without any problems. He cites certain issues affecting her performance such as lack of revision and the poor standard of her course work. Mr. Pritchard is of the view that although Annette 'gets extra scaffolding in lessons' to help her she 'cannot engage'; however, she is beginning to 'turn things around'

Mrs. Baird is of the view that Annette is 'a very good ability girl' but 'she is one of these girls you know that has her own agenda and she is quite difficult to keep

motivated always'. Mrs. Baird reports that although Annette is targeted for an A she got a grade C in the mock exam. Mrs. Baird ascribed her underperformance to health problems, having to go to catch up lessons in Science, Maths and English and not putting in the work in her revision.

Annette reports that half way through Year Ten she has grown up a lot. She is of the view that 'looking back, I could have tried harder and should have taken some things more seriously'. As exams are coming up she revises with her friend. She remarks that 'I want to do well I want to go to university, I want to have enough money to afford things'. Annette stresses that no one in her family, not even her mum has gone to university and that 'I would like to do it for myself so that I can say that I tried'.

Annette reports that her experience of school has been fun 'despite its ups and downs'. She ascribes this fun to 'people' at school including both staff and students. Nevertheless, she reports that she has never got on with her Head of Year who served in that capacity for five years. Annette notes that 'different people get different things out of school depending on what they want to do in life'. She also reports that most of the friends she limes with can't see the point in school. She provides an account of a friend who wants to be a hairdresser and 'can't really see the point in being at school'. Annette reports that 'some things in school like taking off your coat in a building are very petty: it's like the end of the

world; it is doing no body any harm'. Her view is that 'I will miss school when I'm gone' and that 'everyone I know will miss the school'.

Elsa's Story

Elsa is the younger of two siblings living with her parents. She attends the secondary school which is 'down the road from her home' and like her brother she has been there for five years. Elsa appears to have a negative view of herself. She describes herself as 'dozy, loud, annoying, stubborn, bad, naughty and horrible'. When prompted she included the qualities of 'friendly, polite and "classic"'. Mr. Pritchard reported that he liked Elsa. He describes her as a very 'naïve' student who 'comes out with some crazy things'.

Evidence suggests that Elsa cares about her family. Elsa reports she and her mum are exactly the same in that they never really liked school. She explains that her brother 'was really, really quiet and had never even had a break detention'. Hence 'it [her behaviour] was a massive shock because [her mum] thought she would turn out like her brother'. Elsa also reflects on the effect of her behaviour at school on her family. She reports that 'falling into the wrong crowd' and 'getting letters home' was stressing her mum and causing a lot of upset with her mum and dad. She laments over the fact that her 'little cousin is going through the same thing' as she went once did. She also makes reference to her family when

she reports that she wanted to make her mum and dad proud even if she doubts that she has done so. Nevertheless she still 'feels 'deep within' that they love her. Elsa also documents the values that her mum instils in her, that of being independent and saving her money. She reports that her mum was 'going mad' when she spent £300 in two weeks.

Elsa appears to recognise the importance of school. Accordingly, she reports that she 'cannot do without school' and that she sees the need to work during lessons because 'there are people who do not even get a chance to come to school'. She sees school as one of the means of securing a job and pursuing a career. She also reports that she thinks 'school helps' even though she is 'not into it'. Elsa appears to acknowledge school rules regarding attendance and punctuality. She reports that although she has thought about skiving once she wouldn't dare. However, there appears to be some contradiction in Elsa's report. Mr Pritchard acknowledges that Elsa always turns up late for science lessons. Elsa later recounts that she is on a dinner and break report for 'going only down the road' at dinner. She does give not any evidence of how many times she has been on this truancy report before.

Elsa repeatedly acknowledges her lack of commitment to school. She voiced her dislike of school when she states that 'I've never really been very keen into school' 'I am not into school'; 'I've never been into academics and I've never really wanted to come to school'. Elsa says that she has felt this way from the time she

was in 'little school'. Mr. Pritchard recognises Elsa negative attitude to school. In his account he reasoned that 'school is where she comes before she goes home' and that 'the next real part of it is when she gets home'

It appears from her report that Elsa does not enjoy many lessons. Elsa reports that gets bored easily at school. She expresses the view that she does not take part in any other extra-curricular activities. Although her favourite subject is Art, Elsa provides reasons for not wanting to continuing to study it. She feels that 'there is nothing really going with Art'; 'to do Arts I would have to go far away like London' and that "it is really hard to get into a good school'. In the end she reasons that 'for someone who doesn't really like school and isn't really keen about college I would prefer to work first'.

Elsa believes that some subjects are 'a waste of time' and there is no point in doing certain of them since she would 'never use them. Most times she just sits in lessons and tries to work. She acknowledges that she is the one 'not really putting her mind to it'. If a lesson is uninteresting she would 'sit and daydream'. At the end of the school day she looks forward to 'going home and going out after'. Elsa does not do any home work. She states emphatically that 'school is school and home is home'. She strongly points out that she has never really done homework because she has 'never seen the point in doing homework'.

Mr. Pritchard's and Mrs. Baird's accounts show that Elsa does not appear to esteem her lessons highly. Mr. Pritchard gave account of Elsa's lack of preparation for lessons and her poor performance in Science and Maths Module test. He reports that Elsa 'is a concern' because although 'she will try to engage a bit, she does no revision and is very reluctant to produce much work in lessons'. Mrs. Baird also provides a negative view of Elsa's attitude to learning. Her account of Elsa is that she is 'a bright girl but downright lazy and basically tries to disrupt the class by shouting out all the time'. She also reports that Elsa is 'mouth almighty' and 'very immature'.

}
School does not appear to be a priority in Elsa's life. It appears that other areas of interest such as her job and social life are more important than school. Elsa clearly states that 'I've always preferred to work better than school'. She reports that she want a job first [before going to college] because 'if I don't like school I don't think that I would like college as learning is not my thing'. Elsa gives account of the job as Kitchen Assistant that she held for approximately six months which she saw as 'not a big job but better than nothing'. She took the initiative in securing the job by ringing up. She has also secured another job in 'an old people home' after she completes her secondary education in August. The jobs that Elsa has found require little or no educational qualification but they 'allow her to have things now instead of waiting for Christmas'. A job enables Elsa to doing things on her own and prevents her from 'claiming other people's

money'. She recounts that 'if you get your own things and be more independent it is better'.

Elsa report points to two different groups that she associates with. She explained that she goes out with girls in Year Eleven. She also reports that she and her mates are all not deed keen to work at school and that her mates are all fed up of school because they've 'got to go'. In addition, she thinks that sometimes her mates either do not come in, or go out of school and not come back, because that's their way of showing that they 'can't be bothered' about school.

In terms of her social life out of school, Elsa relies to a great extent on girls who have already left school who she sees as 'a lot more mature'. Socialising is important for Elsa since she gets 'bored dead easy' in the house. Socialising takes the form of going out and spending time at her mates' house. Elsa expresses her disgust at teenagers who sit on the street. She describes this situation as 'horrible and the worse thing ever' which does not look right'. She reports that instead, she and her mates ' just go to have a drink ' or if they are having a lot of drinks they 'go round to some one's house'. Elsa reports that if the group are not doing anything they will 'pop down' to the pub. Elsa provides some inconsistencies in her account of her socialising days. During the early part of the interview she reports that 'Friday night is her night out' and she goes to the pub 'on a Sunday not Friday'. Later she declares that 'I go out any day really' and that

her curfew is approximately 10: 30 p.m. However, Elsa does not say whether her curfew applies to both weekdays and weekends.

Elsa feels that group influence has contributed to her poor performance and negative view of school. She feels that she has made a change in her behaviour. She reports that in Year Seven she used to be 'really, really good and had her head down' to doing her work. Even though she 'never really liked school' she 'tried to like it in Year Seven'. She documents that things took a turn for the worse from Year Eight when she became part of the 'wrong crowd' which she described as 'troublemakers'. She recounts that 'I started "faffing about", following people I shouldn't hang around with'. In particular she reports that in Year Eight she decided not to work because 'I didn't like it': 'I fell back and didn't even put me head down'. Hence, in Year Eight, Nine and Ten she felt that she was 'bad'. Elsa reports that as she is in Year 11 she is 'maturing now' as she is no longer in the wrong crowd. This view however contrasts with that of Mr. Pritchard who reports that Elsa 'hangs around with the less desirable elements'. Elsa recognizes that the learning mentor helped her to make the change. This has resulted in 'just the odd letter' being sent home. She reports that in Year 11 she doesn't see the learning mentor again because 'I have gotten better in school'. In her account Elsa identifies the learning mentor's job as one she would like to pursue and feels that the learning mentor is a motivator for her at school since 'all I ever get off the other teachers is how good you were when you were in Year Seven. Elsa also

recounts that 'I'm not proud of what I was doing' and 'would tell others to avoid falling into the wrong crowd'.

Marlene's Story

Marlene describes herself as a 'miserable' person who 'can be a laugh'. Mr. Pritchard describes Marlene as a 'strange little girl' who sometimes gives the impression that she is in an act. He expressed the view that Marlene acts as if she is on the terrace of a football match, talks to you as if she is on the street and 'uses "those types of phrases" so readily, out of context and in an offhand casual manner'. Mr Pritchard reports that he wonders if she understands the social rules on how and where people talk in a conversation and he wonders very much about what she's experienced in the last five years.

Marlene started this school in Year Ten and has been at this school for two years. She reported that she moved to this school because she had family problems and was 'kicked out' of her dad's house. Marlene reports that she used to live with her mum but she has not seen her 'for three years now'. Her mum lives in a hostel and she does not see her mum because 'she did some bad things to her'.

Marlene does not presently live within the school's catchment area of the school. She lives a good distance away from the school about '20 minutes by buses. She lives with her boyfriend who picks her up from school most afternoons. Mrs. Baird reported that Marlene moved out of the area for a short time and since she lived with her boyfriend she stopped coming to school. Accordingly, Mrs. Baird reports that the boyfriend was charged with court action because Marlene 'is a minor living with him [and] he's got responsibility for sending her to school'.

Marlene reports that she 'is a family person'. She keeps in close contact with her Nan (her father's mother) and loves to go shopping with her. Even when she goes out with her friends she stops over by her Nan. Marlene reports that she does not really go out now because she has gotten her own house. She enjoys cleaning and cooking and keeping the house together even if it sometimes 'gets on her nerves'. On Sundays she stays in and does some work around the house and also cooks some dinner. Marlene recounts that 'I really love to cook; my Nan told me that I can be a good cook or chef because I can cook anything'.

Marlene's home commitment appears to have an effect on her school work. She reports that her ability to work during lessons depends on what mood she is in. Marlene report that she can sometimes 'get stressed about things at home' and this cause her to 'switch off' and not learn and she won't work. When she is in that mood she does not answer questions and this affects her performance.

Marlene reports that she does some homework at night time when her boyfriend goes to work.

Marlene looks at her timetable in the morning and decides whether she will enjoy the school day or not. Her key concern in school is about the teaching. She suggests that a good reason why some people might skive is because 'they do not like the teachers'. Marlene reports that when she first came to school there were rumours about some teachers. She remarks that 'they do not take time to teach people here'. In most lessons she gets bored because of the way the lessons are taught. . She enjoys subjects that 'allow you to learn from it' like the English lessons which uses humour, or subjects that is 'practical' and 'allows you to probably take in what the teacher is saying or do more stuff and see what you are doing'. During the interview, Marlene gives an account of the way English and History are taught at this school and compares the History lessons with the ones at her old school.

Marlene reports that she has applied to do Hair and Beauty at a college because it is a practical course. However, although Graphics is a practical subject Marlene reports that the teacher can make it difficult. She recounts that the teacher 'takes half an hour to come to you if you are stuck and need help; and shouts at you because you have done no work but it her fault because she hasn't come to you'.

Marlene reports that 'school is alright'. She looks forward to coming to school everyday to see her mates. She reports that her friends help her to understand the work. However, Marlene's home situation leaves her little time for socialising outside of school with her friends. When she can she goes out with her mates on a Friday night. She doesn't really go out now and hasn't seen her mates for a while now. Marlene likes going out with her mates and she reports that she misses her friends.

Marlene reports that she prefers this school because of the school policy: 'they exclude you when you fight instead of making you write lines'. Marlene suggests that 'school is good but it depends on the attitude you give when you walk through the doors'. She reports that her attitude has changed from Year Ten: 'I used to get E's and D's and now I am getting A's and B's in my course work and everything; so I think that I've done good'.

Phyllis' Story

Phyllis has been at this school for two years having come from a school which was half an hour's drive away by car. She moved to this school as she moved in with her dad who lives in the school catchment area. Phyllis prefers this school since it is 'smaller' and because 'you get more help like after school lessons and revision lessons'.

Phyllis says that she is an 'outgoing person' who likes talking to people and making friends. She reports that she has a lot of hobbies: she likes sports, playing football, athletics and marathon runs. She plays football for a women's team.

Phyllis makes reference to her family during the interview. She lives with her dad and her sister while her brothers live with her mum. Phyllis reports that she gets lonely at home. Her sister 'is sort of out all the time'. Her sister 'works out and is not in a lot because she is eighteen'. Her dad works late but comes in about half five or so sometimes. He 'goes to bed early to go to work early so that he can get the week end off'. Phyllis reports that she has a good relationship with her dad. He motivates her to do a lot of things like football and keeps her from associating with the wrong crowd, from drinking the night before a game and eating the right foods. Her dad likes her 'going out a couple nights a week and encourages [her] to do it'. However, she likes to stay in some nights and make her dad some tea. Phyllis reports that she does not want to fall out with her dad.

Throughout the interview Phyllis consistently stated that 'I do not like' and 'I never liked' school. She did not like her 'old school' or her primary school either. She reports that 'I just don't like it since I was little. I've always wanted to grow up; I'd like to be an adult'. She is of the view that she wouldn't be who she was because of going to school. She reports that some of her friends 'don't like school at all'

because they don't like the teachers and don't like being told what to do. She thinks that perhaps a lot of the people including her friends who skive off lessons 'can't be bothered'. She reports that she tried skiving once but 'it was not worth it because it caused me and me dad to fall out'.

Phyllis does not really like coming to school but likes seeing her friends at school. Although she likes learning new things she thinks that 'socialising is good'. In her view 'although school should be a priority, for me I put socialising first'. Additionally, she reports that although she wished she had worked hard she has still managed to meet friends. Phyllis is 'friend with loads of people' and there is not one person in Year 11 that she dislikes. She sees her friends after school and goes out with her friends on Fridays. Her opinion is that 'if I am stuck in the house I do feel a bit down I like going out'. She thinks that 'if you're good at socialising and talking you will be able to get along in life' and 'get a job'.

Phyllis recognises that school has some importance. She reports that school is 'good' and school helps because it prepares for everything': 'the whole idea of coming to school is 'not what you learn; coming to school on the whole and having teachers prepares you it makes you realise, it makes you think'. Although she finds that a few of the teachers have been unfair, Phyllis acknowledges that at times she has been the one 'messaging about' in lessons. She reports that she likes to work but 'when I can't do it I gets unfocused and at times I start messing around with my friends'. Phyllis states that she wished she 'had tried more

sometimes and worked hard'. She thinks that it is her fault that she has not done as well as she could of: 'I could have asked for help but I chose to mess about'. She recounts that she English, finds Geography difficult and struggles in Science. Although the teachers help a lot 'I struggle to remember and, revise, revise, and revise and somehow it just don't click in when it comes to do it'. She reports that she does not go out every night after school or on Sundays. When she is at home she sits in her room to do her work and to revise. She thinks that she will pass a few of her GCSE subjects. Phyllis wants to go to college to do Sport Science or wants to train to be a Health and Fitness Trainer or a Dietician. Although GCSE will help her to go to college, Phyllis thinks she 'can do it on her own', that is; to 'get a job and move up'. Phyllis reports that she has realised it now that it is worth going to school and that GCSE will help her to get on a course at college and get a job in the meantime. However 'I prefer to start to work and if I want to go to college I know what I want to do'.

Phyllis thinks that she would like to do more sports and less academics. She takes her football 'quite serious' and goes to football training after school. She reports that she can't smoke and is 'quite sensible when having a drink'. She reports that someone comes to give all members of the club a drug test: 'they don't tell you when they're coming they just come out of the blue like that'. Phyllis is happy about playing in the FA, which she sees as an important league. She reports that she just recently played her first game in the women's team as a reserve.

Mr. Pritchard sees Phyllis as 'a thorn in his side' and acknowledges that 'she is a real concern'. According to him 'she is not interested the slightest' and she 'has been reluctant to engage' and 'reluctant to do anything even after desperately trying to get her to engage', which caused her grades to suffer accordingly. Mr. Pritchard reports that Phyllis 'never has a pen or a book, she is very mouthy and rude to staff and wants to chat with her friends' Further, he states that 'she is really unhappy when she is made to work'. Mr. Pritchard reports that Phyllis has started to produce some reasonable work which had him to wonder 'if this was her work'. However, his opinion is that 'I can't see any evidence in her work that she's gonna make it'.

Mrs. Baird comments that she has seen little of Phyllis who 'has been in and out of school'. She reports that Phyllis has done little RE work. If Phyllis is with Marlene she gets no work done. However, Mrs. Baird states that when Marlene was absent she saw another side to Phyllis where 'she was polite, asked the right questions as if she wanted to work'.

Rachel's Story

Rachel describes herself as an 'outgoing' 15 year old girl who is 'not really quiet'. Mrs. Baird is of the view that that in term of personality, she does not have a problem with Rachel. Rachel has been at this school for five years and lives a bus ride away from the school in the catchment area. Rachel is currently in the top set at school. She recounts that she used to like school in Year Seven and Eight.

Rachel reports that 'school is alright but I just don't like it'. Rachel feels strongly against the idea of coming to school and openly states that 'I she dislike school'. She does not look forward to coming to school and wants to stay home. She stresses that school is 'a place I go until I leave'. Rachel does not appear to accept the school rule on attendance. She reports that she always leaves school and she is currently on a truancy report which I had to sign to show that she was with me at the time stated. She reports that she always truant on her own by 'walking to the bus stop and getting back home'. Rachel reckons that 'I don't do anything connected to school; I'm even going to the school prom although I may go'. This is the same view that Mr. Pritchard expresses when he reports that 'she stands out because she doesn't get involved in anything outside of lessons really'.

Rachel sees school as a place to meet friends. According to Mr. Pritchard, Rachel 'tends to circulate in peer groups' which he believes engage in negative behaviours. To him, 'she is more interested in her social life after school'. Rachel reports that she gets on with every one at school: 'I don't care much about the people at school; I speak to them when I choose'. She is happy to go out with her boyfriend. After school, on the days when she does not work, Rachel reports that she gets changed and goes, along with her friends, to her boyfriend's home and stay there. She also goes out with her boyfriend on Sunday nights.

Rachel's dislike of school is shown in her attitude to her lessons. Rachel's report indicates that she appears to exhibit a lackadaisical and 'I don't care' attitude during lessons. Rachel reports that some lessons like English are 'boring'. She goes to most lessons and occupies herself by just doing 'doodles and stuff like that' and that she 'is not bothered' by the teachers. Rachel reports that she hates studying and has 'not done home work for ages'. This account has been confirmed by both Ms. Baird and Mr. Pritchard.

Mrs. Baird view of Rachel's attitude to learning in class she is fine. 'It's doing the work at home that a problem'. She reports that Rachel did not do very well in her GCSE mock exam because there was lack of revision. According to Mr. Pritchard, 'her Key Stage Three grades suggest that "she should walk it"'. However he reports that Rachel is struggling to get a Grade C because 'she simply isn't doing anything at home'. Mr. Pritchard reports that although she can

do the work in school 'she sometimes arrives in lesson not really in a frame of mind for it'. He reports that 'she cannot engage', 'she was underachieving for a significant period of time and is starting to come around'. Rachel states that has already gotten her Maths at GCSE level and is of the view that she is going to do well in her GCSE exams. She reports that 'I'm not going to fail them' but I don't really need them and don't see the point in them. She also reports that 'I have learnt some things in school but it is just a lot of things that I will not need'.

Rachel's opinion is that school has not really prepared her for what she wanted to do. Her view is that 'All you do when you go to school is to learn to read and write, don't you? They teach you a lot of pointless stuff.' She is of the view that she does not need to know about subjects like Chemistry to do hairdressing. She appears upset at the fact that she was denied the opportunity to do Hairdressing as an option subject at college because 'she was too clever'. Rachel reports that 'training is better than going to school'. She quotes her Form Tutor who told her that 'the important thing is 'not how you learn but what you learn' and, 'GCSE is proving if you remember stuff'.

Rachel's life is centred on her job in a Hairdresser's shop and this may have had an influence on her school life. Rachel's job appears to take precedence over her school work. She wants to go straight to work when she leaves school. Rachel's firm views contrast with that of Mr. Pritchard. He believes that 'she is one of those kids who find it difficult to actually think about what is going to happen next to

them and who lacks a focus on what they want to do when they leave'. Rachel has been working in a Hairdresser's salon since she was 14 years and has been working there for over a year now. She works from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Wednesdays to Fridays and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays. Rachel reports that 'instead of school I would have liked to spend my days working'. Working is a means of 'getting money' and getting 'something to do instead of sitting home all the time doing nothing' and instead of 'being lazy and get other people's money'.

Appendix 7

Modified Phases of Thematic Analysis

The table shows the modified view of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Phase 2 of the table has been changed to reflect the use of case narratives in stead of transcripts.

	Phase	Description of the process
1	Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribing students' interview data, reading data and noting down initial ideas
2	Generating case narratives	Producing a descriptive case study for each student
3	Generating codes	Coding interesting features of the entire interview data set (both students' narratives and teachers' transcribed interview data), collecting data relevant to each code
4	Searching for themes and naming the themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering data relevant to each theme and generating names for each theme
5	Producing the reports	Selection of vivid extracts, relating the descriptive analysis to the research question(s) and literature producing a report of the analysis

Modified Phases of thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87)

Appendix 8

Description of School and Catchment Area

Introduction

The Redmoor Community High School (RCHS) is a mixed 11-16 secondary school of non denominational religion located in North East of Staffordshire in the West Midlands region of England. The account of the school, its intake and its catchment area is derived from interviews and/ or conversation with three staff members who have been teaching at the school for an average of fifteen years. Mrs. Baird has been teaching at the school for twenty nine years and is currently the Head of Department for Religious Education. Mr. Pritchard has been at employed at the school for thirteen years and is currently the Head of Department for Science. More recently, Mr. Douglas has been with the school from 2005 and is serving in the capacity of Form tutor.

Context of the school: Background

The teachers' account

Redmoor is depicted by the staff as a school that has undergone much change over the years. Mrs. Baird's testimony was that 29 years aback the school had attracted many students from a wide catchment area and had a promising future. However she recounted that: *'During my time here there have been five head teachers and after the first head teacher left three to four years later the school*

became rough'. This was also the sentiment shared by Mr. Pritchard who reported that: *'When I came here it was like Beirut, it really was very rough'*

This remained the state of affairs at RCHS until 1995 when a new head teacher was appointed. Both Mrs. Baird and Mr. Pritchard reported that the seeds of change had definitely been sown by the head when he took up office then. Mrs. Baird also related that although the school had failed its OFSTED in the month following his appointment, this failure was no fault of the head teacher. Rather, in his support, she put it down to previous 'bad management' and 'bad behaviour' on the part of students. She further explained that although the school was placed in special measures, the head teacher was able to 'move the school on'. Likewise, Mr. Pritchard thought that the head was a very good leader who had really instigated change in terms of management as well as teaching and learning skills. The corollary was that the school acquired a new identity as reflected in name change to the one currently being used. This is evidenced in the following statement by Mr. Pritchard:

'...he took the school through a very, very quick change. He really hit the ground: one, he was very visible and he introduced a lot more structure to the school and a lot stricter discipline so that by the time 1998, 1999 came around, the school was a completely different place and as a result it changed its name to RCHS'

After this head left six years later, events at Redmoor took a turn for the worse and teachers reported a decline in the school standards that had been set by him. In particular, Mr. Pritchard ascribed such change to the appointment of a female head. As he recalled:

'I sense that the em, the ethos of the school changed slightly and it became err how you say 'hard edged'. Still a caring school, very much a caring school but she didn't suffer fools lightly whether it was staff or pupils and she was very, very transparent in the way she(laughs) dealt with people and if she didn't think that people were not doing what they should she would make it very, very obvious'.

With the departure of this female head teacher a male replacement was made in 2006. Mr. Pritchard could only talk of the good qualities of this head teacher. However, I got the impression from his reaction during the interview that he was carefully managing his impression of the head teacher. He had thought hard about what he had said and had taken long pauses as the following statements seem to indicate:

'Now he is a, a, aHe is, he's a religious man, he's got very firm beliefs about how we should care for the kids and make sure that we provide for them and that is strength of his. He is very, he has empathy for the kids, that's not to say the others hadn't but it's a particular strength of his; and so much for the present day.'

Mr. Douglas who has been recently employed by the school spoke of the school in comparison to the one he had just left. To him, Redmoor stood in direct contrast to this five star, high performance school, where students had high aspirations and expectations.

The school's catchment and its intake

Both Mrs. Baird and Mr. Pritchard concurred that the school is situated on an affluent or fairly middle class housing estate and draws very few of its cohort from the surrounding areas. One reason for this decline as given by Mrs. Baird is that the individuals now living on the estate are from a new generation whose families have moved out of the estate. Although this may be true to a certain extent I reckon that the negative portrayal of the school may also have resulted in fewer parents opting for Redmoor as a school of choice for their children.

The school population is now approximately 500 students a far cry from what obtained when Mrs. Baird took up employment with the school twenty nine years earlier. Mrs. Baird recalled that at the inception of her teaching career at Redmoor, students who were bussed in from a wide catchment area almost 5 km (3.1 miles) away. However, at present, the most students are drawn from a smaller catchment area approximately 2.3 km (1.4 miles) in radius. Supporting evidence is given as follows:

'the area was much bigger we used to have three or four double Decker buses ... when I came in , now we've got three single Decker buses and they're not even full to capacity so it has been a big change over the years and the type of child that come to the school...'

Mrs. Baird also reported a change in the intake both in terms of family background and size. By the time Mr. Pritchard arrived sixteen years later the cohort was generally portrayed as hard core element from a certain ilk and remained as such at present. Hence, although Redmoor had realised some structural changes, Mr. Pritchard was of the view as the nature of the school's intake had not change much in the thirteen years he had been there.

Mrs. Baird described the school's catchment as socially deprived areas located on the outskirts of the town which drew almost three quarters of the school's intake. Mr. Pritchard was of the view that some parts of the catchment area were regarded as middle class areas; however, his further explanations suggested contrary. Supportive evidence is provided as follows:

'...I would say if you look at our free school meals ratio, it would suggest that we tend to have quite a significant proportion of em deprived households here as well. And err; we tend to have the complete batch. We have very, very able kids and em, we also have kids who have quite significant special needs, quite a lot going

on at home to be honest em you just have to look around the school and see some of the kids who come in late. I don' t want to mention names, but there are a lot of lads and girls you can see who have a lot going on outside school..'

Further supportive evidence is supplied by Mr. Douglas. The catchment is perceived by him to be an area with a fairly high proportion of rented or council housing consisting predominantly of single parent families. This contrasts markedly to the intake from his previous school, which were drawn from private housing in a middle class area. Mr. Douglas cites the single parent as a possible factor responsible for the poor behaviour of students at Redmoor. Accordingly, he has explained it in this way:

'quite a lot of single parent families in this school I am not sure what the population is, e.g. in the year eleven engineering class the only two trouble makers in the class are from single parent families.'